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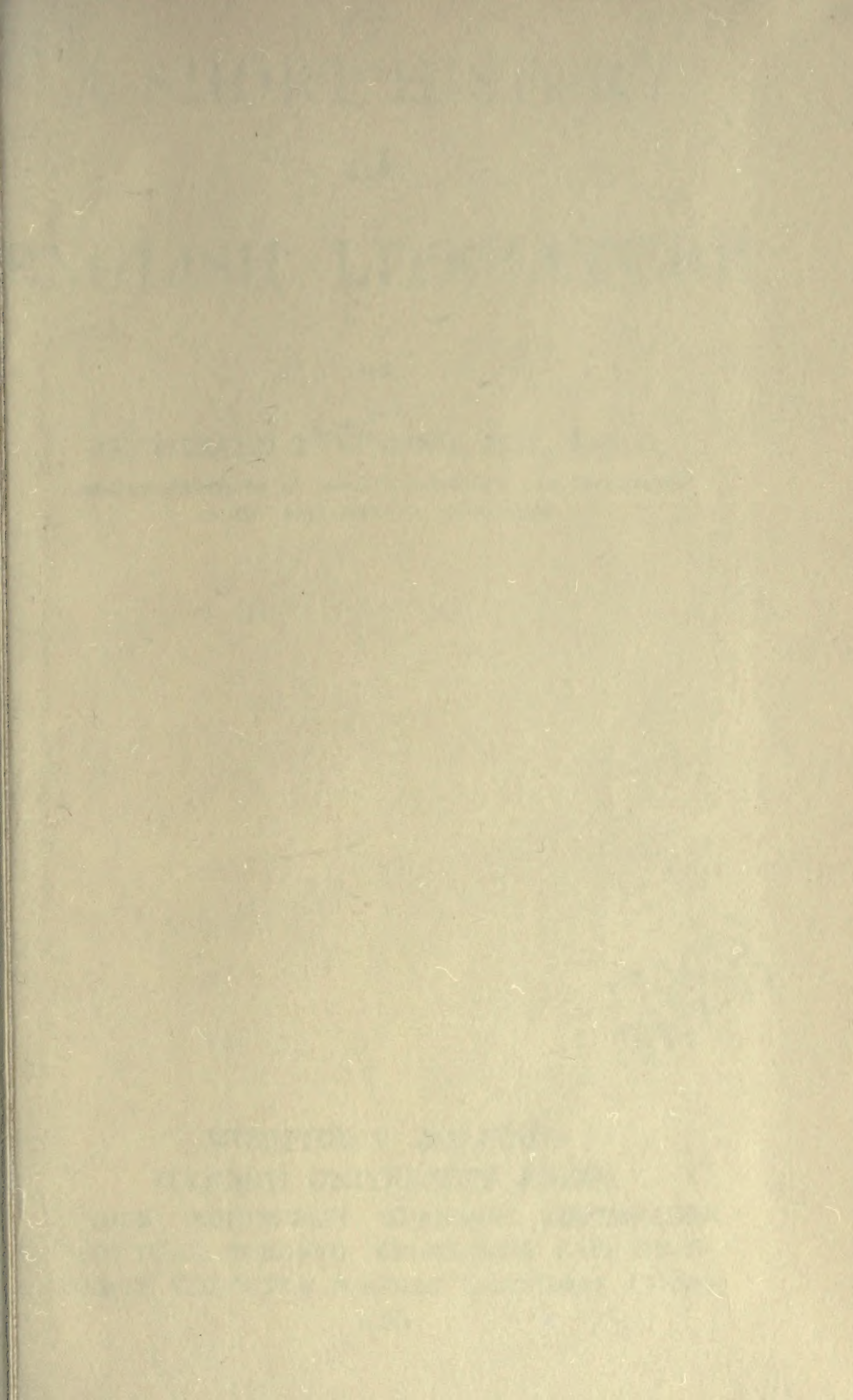
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A SHORT HISTORY

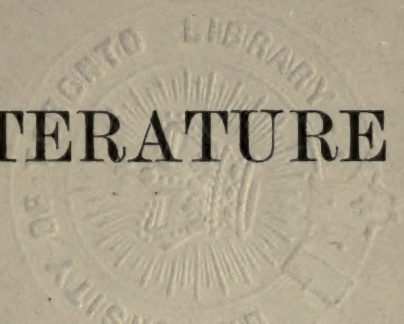
OF

ENGLISH LITERATURE

BY

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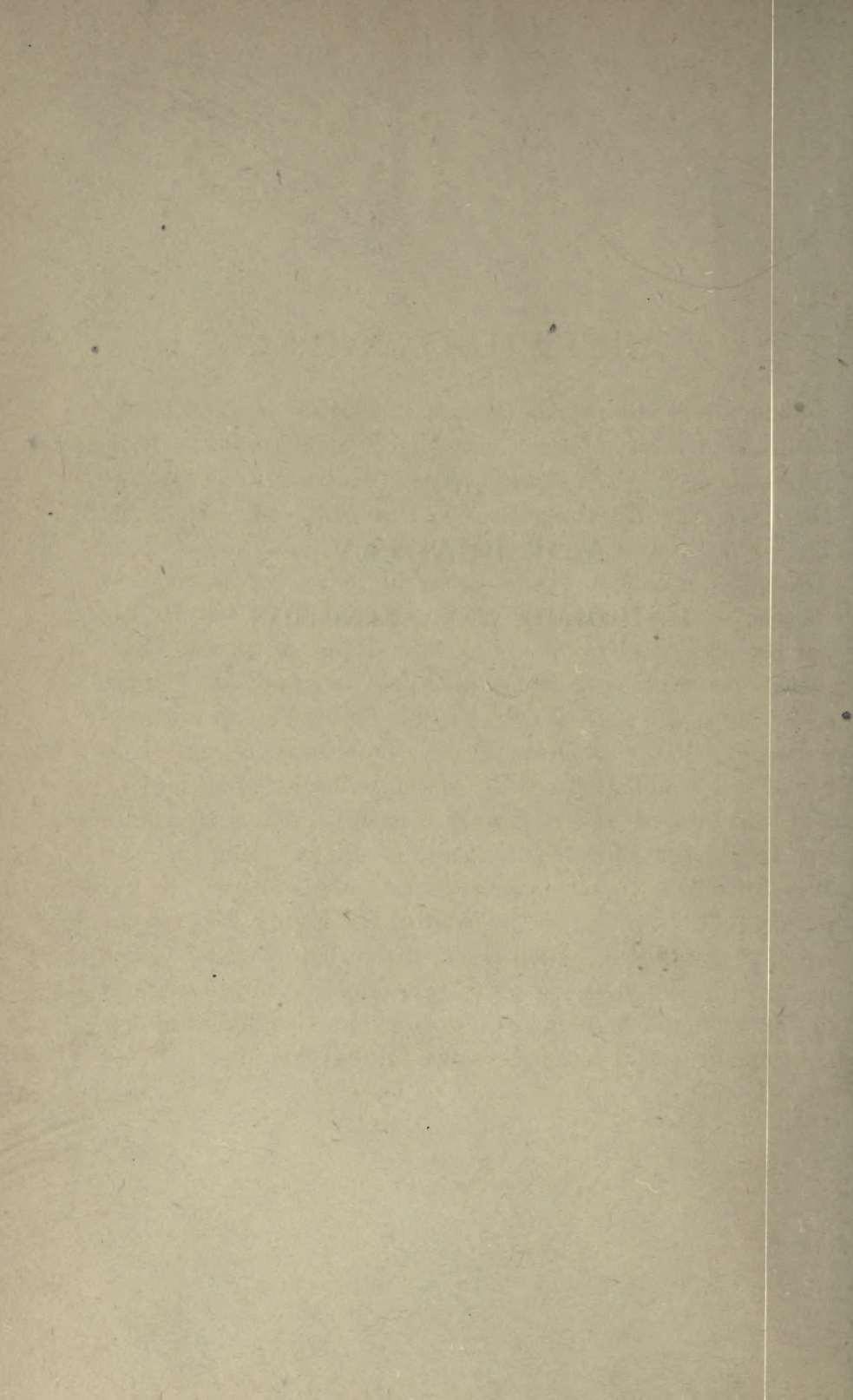




TO

A. C. BRADLEY

IN HOMAGE AND AFFECTION





## PREFATORY NOTE

THIS Short History of English Literature was originally intended to have been written in collaboration with Professor R. S. Wallace, M.A., Professor of English Language and Literature in the University of Melbourne. The War, however, called Professor Wallace away from Australia on active service, after he had written the first chapter and a fragment of the second. It fell to his partner to complete the book. In doing so he was compelled, for reasons of space, to avoid biographical details, except in so far as these had a direct bearing on an author's writings. His conviction that, where occasion offers, a history of English literature should discuss the thought and faith of a great writer no less than his art, will explain his treatment of such writers as Blake, Shelley, and Wordsworth. Some apology or explanation should perhaps be offered for the writing of a new History of English Literature when there are already good older histories in the field. A partial justification may be found in the attempt here made to bring the treatment of the subject abreast of recent research and criticism.

A. T. S.



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# A SHORT HISTORY OF ENGLISH LITERATURE

## CHAPTER I

### FROM THE BEGINNINGS TO THE NORMAN CONQUEST

The earliest English poetry — *Beowulf* — Christian poetry — Cædmon and Cynewulf — Early English prose — Bede, Alfred, Ælfric.

It is customary to classify Old English, or, to use the more popular term, Anglo-Saxon, poetry under two heads, pagan and Christian, according as it finds its subjects in the legends of Teutonic heathendom or, after the introduction of Christianity, in biblical story and ecclesiastical ritual and tradition. The classification is a just one, although it may obscure, if too strictly interpreted, one of the most interesting things in Old English poetry—the curious mingling in the same poem of pagan and Christian elements. The pagan poems, for reasons which will soon appear, have often a colouring of Christian sentiment, while the poems on biblical themes do not break so completely with the heathen narratives as not to adopt something of their method and spirit.

Old  
English  
Poetry.

The tribes who invaded and occupied England in the fifth and sixth centuries were heathen marauders from Denmark and the north coast of Germany. They belonged to that group of nations whose civilization Tacitus describes in his *Germania*. Of their literature at the time of the invasion we know nothing directly, but we can infer from the poems which remain that there were current among them songs and lays telling of the great deeds of the warriors and kings of the Teutonic world. These hero-songs were handed on orally from generation to generation, and were recited by minstrels or *scops* at tribal or festive gatherings. Not many of them have survived; doubtless a few only were written down, at a later time when the art of writing was acquired from Irish and Roman missionaries. The poem *Widsith*, which in its first form may belong to the fourth century—for additions were made to it from time to time to keep it up to date—is not itself a hero-song, but rather a list of the great kings whose deeds were the themes of such songs. It tells of the wanderings of a *scop* among the Teutonic tribes. *Deor's Lament* is also the story of a minstrel, in which reference is made, by way of illustration, to well-known names and legends. Of hero-songs proper there survive two fragments, *Finnsburh*

and *Waldhere*—records of bitter feuds and fierce fighting—and the poem *Beowulf*.

*Beowulf*

*Beowulf* is the only poem of any length—it runs to three thousand one hundred and eighty-two lines—which has come down to us, of the early heroic poetry of the Teutons. There is no certainty about the date of its composition. It is extant in a manuscript of the tenth century, but this manuscript must be a copy of a much older original. The possibilities are that the poem, which contains several references to the narrative of the Old Testament, and speaks frequently of the God of the Christian religion, was put together in the late seventh century by a Christian poet who interested himself in the songs and lays of his heathen forefathers, and, making a selection of them, worked them into a consecutive story. Whether he rewrote and refashioned the old lays, or merely edited them without making any very great changes, it is impossible to say; in the present state of our knowledge it may be nearer the truth to speak of him as the shaper or editor rather than as the actual author. There is nothing distinctively English in the poem. The scenes are laid in Denmark and South Sweden: the tribes who play a part in the action are Danes, Geats, Swedes, and Frisians. It is clear, therefore, that, if the poem was written in England—and of that there can be little doubt—the legends were carried, in all likelihood in the form of short lays, by the English from their continental home, and remained current among them for many years after the settlement. Though biblical allusions abound, and the heathen deities have, for the most part, vanished before the editing—if we may call it editing—of the Christian reviser, the background is not Christian but heathen.

The main story deals with the adventures of *Beowulf* in his contest with ogres and dragons. We are told how the hall of Hrothgar, King of the Danes, is devastated for the space of twelve years by a demon called Grendel. *Beowulf*, nephew of Hygelac, King of the Geats, a tribe of South Sweden, crosses the sea to help Hrothgar, and in fight in his hall, mortally wounds Grendel. Grendel's mother, seeking vengeance for the death of her son, renews the attacks. *Beowulf* tracks her to her lair, a cave at the bottom of a deep mere, and slays her. Loaded with gifts, he returns to his native land, where he ultimately succeeds to the throne. In his old age a fire-breathing dragon lays waste the land. *Beowulf* attacks and kills it, but is himself wounded to death in the fray. The poem ends with an account of his burial amid the mourning of his whole people.

This short summary does scant justice to the poem. In outline the story is trivial enough, a typical folk-tale; but it is interspersed with many subsidiary legends, historical and mythical, and with allusions to legends, which open up for us the life of Teutonic heathendom, and lift the story far above a mere recital of the deeds of a giant-killer. *Beowulf* is the



picture of a whole civilization, of the Germania which Tacitus describes. The main interest which the poem has for us is thus not a purely literary interest. *Beowulf* is an important historical document, recreating for us a whole society, telling us, in most authentic fashion, of life as it was lived in far-off heathen days. The rites which are practised in the poem are heathen rites. The hero is the typical Teutonic warrior, the embodiment of valour and loyalty, the supreme virtues of those days. Tacitus tells us that among the Teutonic tribes 'it is a reproach on the battlefield for a chief to be surpassed in valour, a reproach for his retinue not to equal the prowess of its chief; but to have left the field and have survived one's chief—this means life-long infamy and shame'. *Beowulf* bears this out. 'Better is death', says one of the hero's companions, 'to every one of noble birth than an inglorious life.' His life is inglorious who shows cowardice or who fails his lord at need.

The Christian allusions show up rather incongruously against the pervading paganism. Fate is the driving power in the poem. 'Fate goes ever as it must.' 'Death', we read, 'is not easy to escape from, let him try who will, but, impelled by Fate, he shall win the place prepared for soul-possessors, earth-dwelling sons of men, where his body, fast in its narrow bed, shall sleep after the banquet.' Knowing that his hour is fixed and that nothing can avert his doom, it behoves a man not to whine but to act his part bravely. There is no joy in the poem, no hope. Life is a warfare, and a man must face it with what fortitude he may.

No little art is shown in *Beowulf* in the introduction of other stories besides the main one—stories of the heroic past—by way of illustration and contrast. These, as we have said, were doubtless the themes of separate lays which the shaper of *Beowulf* knew and worked upon. One of them, that of Finn, has in fact been preserved in an independent form in the fragment on the *Fight at Finnsburh*. It is tolerably certain that *Beowulf* is only one of many old sagas, of which no trace remains. Much else has perished too. Tacitus tells us that the hymns of the Teutonic tribes 'celebrate a God Tuisto, a scion of the soil, and his son Mannus, as the beginning and the founders of their race'. These religious hymns of the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes have disappeared: we depend for our knowledge of the Teutonic deities on Scandinavian literature. One or two incantations alone survive in English, short snatches of song sung to increase the fertility of the soil and to ward off evil. Three longer poems, which may very well be of early date, although, like *Beowulf*, they have been touched up with Christian sentiment, are elegiac in tone and speak wistfully, as does *Beowulf*, of the transitoriness of life, the inhospitality of Nature, and the power of fate. *The Wanderer*, a poem of one hundred and fifteen lines, is the lament of one who has lost his lord and travels companionless over the

Other early poems.

rime-cold sea. The whole world is darkened by his sorrow ; ' all this tract of earth is full of hardship, and fate changes everything under the heavens '. *The Seafarer*, a poem of one hundred and eight lines, describes the lure of the ' weltering waves ' : a seafaring life is full of hardship, but, for all its misery, it exercises a fatal fascination. *The Ruin* is the description of a wasted city. Two love poems, *The Wife's Complaint* and *The Husband's Message*, the exact interpretation of which is still a matter of doubt, close the list of these, presumably heathen, lyrics.

With the coming of Augustine and the conversion of the English to Christianity, new themes were opened up for the *scôp* and the poet. We are not to suppose that the old pagan poetry ceased at once to find an audience : some of it, like *Beowulf*, was put into writing, as we have seen, by Christian scholars, who would, as far as possible, eliminate all references to heathen deities and substitute the conceptions of the Christian faith. We have abundant evidence of the continued popularity of the old poetry, as, for example, in the letter which Alcuin wrote in 797 to Cœnwulf, King of Mercia,<sup>1</sup> and, in a more indirect way, in the manner in which the new Christian poetry caught its spirit and imitated its phrases. Moreover, four centuries after the coming of Augustine, there appear several poems, notably those on the battles of Brunanburh (937) and Maldon (991), quite in the heroic manner.

*The Battle of Maldon.*

The poem on the battle of Maldon is the finest example of Old English heroic poetry and one of the most stirring battle-poems in our language. It describes the determined resistance which Byrhtnoth, Ealdorman of Essex, made against a raiding army of Danes under Olaf Tryggvason. Byrhtnoth falls, but his following rally round his dead body, and fight to the last. Their creed is the same as that of Wiglaf, *Beowulf's* devoted thane :

' Leofsunu spake, as he raised his linden shield : " This vow I make that I will not budge a foot's length, but will avenge my lord. Round Sturmere never shall our sturdy fighters have need to say with scornful words that I, when my lord had fallen, turned from the fray, and went lordless home. " '

Two famous lines in the poem sum up the heroic temper :

Harder must be the heart, bolder the spirit,  
Greater must be our courage, as our strength grows less.

Christian Poetry.

Inevitably, however, Christianity, with its refining, softening influence, encroached upon the traditions of pagan poetry. Stories from the Bible and episodes from the lives of the saints began to compete with stories from the heroic past.

<sup>1</sup> ' Let the work of God ', says the letter, ' be read at priestly banquets. There it is fitting to listen to a reader, not to a harper ; to the discourses of the Fathers, not to the songs of the heathen. What has Ingeld to do with Christ ? ' Ingeld is often mentioned in the heathen poetry : there is a legend about him in *Beowulf*.



We can see the process at work in *Beowulf*, where the scop who entertains Hrothgar's company of an evening, recites on one occasion the tale of Sigmund the Volsung, on another the story of Finn, while on a third he tells how 'the Almighty made the earth, appointed the effulgence of the sun and moon as light for land-dwellers, and fashioned life for all kinds that live and move'. This last recitation was after the manner of the new poetry which was becoming popular when *Beowulf* was put into writing, and which drew its themes from the Bible story, as in *Genesis*, *Exodus*, *Daniel*, *Christ and Satan*; from saints' lives, as in *Juliana*, *Elene*, *Andreas*, *Guthlac*; from the apocrypha, as in *Judith*; or from the services of the church, as in *Crist*. *The Dream of the Rood* and *The Phoenix* are more fanciful handlings of similar themes. These poems—with the exception of *Judith*, which is found in the same manuscript as *Beowulf*, have come down to us in three great manuscript collections, the so-called Junian MS., now at Oxford, the Exeter Book in Exeter Cathedral, and the Vercelli MS. in the Cathedral library of Vercelli, in North Italy.

It is impossible to assign exact dates to these poems: all that we are sure of is that they belong to a time between the seventh and tenth centuries, say, between A.D. 650 and 1000. Two names only, those of Cædmon and Cynewulf, have been associated with them—Cædmon's on the strength of a well-known passage in Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* (731), where we are told how Cædmon, an inmate of the monastery of Whitby during the abbacy of Hilda (658–680), was miraculously endowed with the gift of song. 'He sang first', says Bede, 'of the earth's creation, and the beginning of man, and all the story of Genesis, and afterwards about the departure of the people of Israel from the land of Egypt, and about many other narratives in the books of the canon of scripture.' On the evidence of this account of Bede's, and because of the similarity which a hymn, paraphrased in Latin by Bede and attributed by him to Cædmon, bears to the opening of the metrical paraphrases of *Genesis*, the poems of the Junian MS., *Genesis*, *Exodus*, *Daniel*, *Christ and Satan*, came to be regarded as Cædmon's work. This view has now been abandoned. Although they belong to that class of poetical paraphrases which Cædmon, on Bede's showing, certainly practised, they are probably of a later date, and by different authors. Part of *Genesis*, indeed, is known to be an adaptation of an Old Saxon poem, and can hardly have been earlier than 850, two centuries later than Cædmon. Of the life of Cynewulf we know nothing, although many legends have been woven round his name. He may have lived, as has been generally supposed, about the year 800. He inserted his name in runic letters in four poems, *Crist*, *Juliana*, *Elene*, and *The Fates of the Apostles*, while several others, such as *Andreas*, *The Dream of the Rood*, and *The Phoenix*, have been attributed to him, but on evidence not always very convincing.

Although their subjects are of a religious character, there is much in these poems which recalls the earlier heroic verse. Occasion is found to describe incidents and situations such as were common in the pagan poems. When an opportunity is given for the introduction of scenes of battle, it is seldom lost. Moreover, the relationship in which men and angels stand to God is conceived after the manner of that of clansmen to their chief, while the virtues of courage and loyalty, which receive such emphasis in *Beowulf*, are eulogized again and again. *Genesis* has a vivid account of the fall of the angels, in which faithlessness to God, his over-lord, is regarded as Satan's principal crime. *Exodus* resounds with the clash of shields and the tramp of armies, showing such sympathy with the pride and pomp of war that Ten Brink was led to believe that its author was a heathen singer who in latter life turned Bible-poet. 'In no old English poetry is the martial passion so marked, so exclusive: and this is the more striking as the action involves no battle at all, but merely a struggle of the Egyptians with the waves.' *Andreas*, dealing with the acts of St. Andrew, opens very much as *Beowulf* does; the twelve disciples, the apostles of peace and good tidings, become typical Teutonic warriors. 'Lo! we have heard of twelve glorious men in olden days under the stars, the thanes of God: nor did their glory fail them in the fray, when standards clashed together. . . . They were mighty men over the earth, brave leaders of the people, bold in battle, stout of heart, when hand and buckler shielded the helm on the plain of war, on the field of fate.'<sup>1</sup> *Elene*, which tells how St. Helena, mother of the Emperor Constantine, found the true cross, and *Judith*, are memorable for their descriptions of sea and battle.

The Cynewulfian poems are more lyrical, more intimately personal, than those which have been attributed to Cædmon. They are full of the sense of sin and the necessity for forgiveness, and are, therefore, more definitely Christian. This is especially so with *Crist*, whose themes are the Nativity, the Ascension, and the Last Judgment: part of it is an expansion, lyrical in nature, of the choral services of the church. *The Dream of the Rood*, in which the Cross speaks and describes the Passion, is the finest flower of all this religious poetry.

Mention has to be made of the *Riddles*, ninety-five in number, once attributed to Cynewulf, but no longer regarded as his.

<sup>1</sup> Hwæt! we gefrunan on fyrndagum  
twelfe under tunglum tireadige hæleð  
þeodnes þegnas. No hira þrym alæg  
camprædenne, þonne cumbol hneotan.

þæt wæron mære men ofer eorðan,  
frome folctogan and fyrdhwate,  
rofe rincas, þonne rond ond hand  
on herefelda helm ealgodon,  
on meotudwange.



The writing of riddles was a favourite poetic pastime: there is extant more than one collection in Latin; one is by Aldhelm, Bishop of Sherborne (died 709). The Old English riddles are noteworthy for their intimate portrayal of natural scenery, particularly of the sea in storm and calm.

The poems mentioned above, with a few others of minor importance, make up the record of what survives of Old English poetry—only a small fragment, we may be sure, of what once existed. All this poetry is written in an alliterative metre without rhyme, the common form of verse in early times among all the Teutonic nations. Each line is sharply divided into two parts by a pause or caesura, and has four stressed syllables, two in either half-line. Of these stressed syllables at least two, often three, begin with the same consonant, or with vowels, thus:

Byrhtnoð maþelode, bord hafenode,  
Wand wacne æsc, wordum mælde,  
Yrre and anræd, ageaf him andsware.

Byrhtnoth spake then, his buckler he lifted,  
Shook his slender spear, these words he shouted,  
Angry and undismayed, answer he gave him.

The unstressed syllables vary in number, so that the lines are of uneven length. The diction of this poetry differs markedly from that of prose, and abounds in periphrastic expressions, as when a ship is called 'an ocean-horse' (brimhengest) or 'a wave-goer' (yplida). There seems to have been a large store of stock phrases regarded by every poet as common poetic coin on which he might ring the changes, when he had not the skill to invent phrases of his own. The poem on Brunanburh (Tennyson's translation will give any one who cannot read Old English a fair idea of the poem and of the movement of Old English verse in general) is little more than a skilful patchwork of traditional phraseology, a cento of quotations, like a schoolboy's Latin verses. We have already seen how the vocabulary of the heroic poetry was adapted to religious themes, as in the opening of *Andreas*, often with little change. Yet, in spite of the frequent employment of a conventional poetic diction, the Old English poets can at times write with real eloquence and feeling. They are at their best when they describe the turmoil of battle and the terrors of the sea.

Old English prose cannot compare in variety or interest with Old English poetry; there is nothing in prose to set beside *Beowulf*. The poetry in spirit and metre and rhythm is original and indigenous, even when, as in the religious poems, its themes are borrowed; the prose is a secondary literature, following Latin prose with uncertain steps, as it was destined to do for many centuries to come. Its range is also limited: it is used mainly for instructional purposes, and is too desperately in earnest to have much time for the artistic graces. England has to wait many years for a prose in any way

Anglo-Saxon  
Metre.

Old  
English  
Prose.

comparable with that evolved so early, without outside help, in Iceland.

Latin Prose.— From the time of the introduction of Christianity, Latin became the formidable rival of the vernacular as a prose medium, and remained so till the seventeenth century. The English from the first took kindly to Latin culture, and very soon after the arrival of Augustine, there sprang up throughout the land schools for the advancement of Latin learning, notably those at Canterbury and York. For one and a half centuries (*circa* 650–800) England was well in the forefront of European scholarship. The greatest product of this Latin learning is the *Ecclesiastical History* (*Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*) by Bede (673–735), a priest of the monastery of Jarrow. Bede's history, one of our first-rate authorities for the early history of England, the record of one who himself saw the transition from the old faith to the new, is one of those books which never lose their charm, and is as fresh to-day as when it was written. Other scholars who acquired more than a local reputation were Aldhelm, who died Bishop of Sherborne in 709, author, among other things, of a hundred riddles in Latin verse, from which the English riddles drew some of their inspiration; and Alcuin (735–804), the writer of several commentaries and of many interesting letters, who in 782 was summoned to the Continent by Charlemagne to direct the education of France. These writers—and they are only three out of many—also wrote vernacular prose and verse, but only their Latin works have survived, being those alone on which they themselves set any value.

English Prose—Alfred. All this learning, which the monasteries and the monastic schools so sedulously cultivated, was swept away by the incursions of the heathen Danes, and it was not until the time of Alfred that an attempt was made to revive it. How disastrous to the cause of learning these incursions were we may gather from Alfred's preface to his translation of Pope Gregory's *Cura Pastoralis*. Here Alfred tells us that, when he came to the throne (871), there were very few persons on either side of the Humber who could read Latin: he could not think of a single one south of the Thames. He recalls with envy the days when foreigners came to England in search of wisdom and instruction—the days of Bede and Alcuin—and announces his resolve, in view of the general ignorance of Latin, to translate 'such books as are most needful for all men to know into the language which we can all understand'. Alfred's labours established English prose.

Among his translations are those of Gregory's *Pastoral Care*, Orosius's *History of the World*, Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, and Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*, the standard works of the day on theology, history, and philosophy. Alfred does not follow his originals with very great closeness, but omits, adds, and expands to suit his purposes. In his translation of Orosius he inserted one notable passage of his own,



the account, which he took down from their own lips, of the voyages of two Norwegians, Ohthere and Wulfstan, round the North Cape and far into the Baltic Sea. It is a bright, clear narrative, all too short, wonderfully simple and direct (not unlike the narratives of Hakluyt's seamen, among which it afterwards found a worthy place), which gives us a better idea than all the translations of the capabilities of Old English as a prose vehicle. In his translation Alfred is hampered by the Latin, and even when he is writing independent of it, should the occasion seem to him to call for a more formal style, as in the preface to the *Pastoral Care*, the influence of Latin syntax is evident in his long, intricate sentences. In the passage on the Norwegian explorers Alfred writes as he must have talked, forgetting his Latin syntax; it is a pity he ever wrote otherwise. There are passages in the *Chronicle*, too, which are expressed in the same direct and simple way. The *English Chronicle*, which is extant in several recensions and takes the history backward to the invasion of Caesar, and, in one recension, forward to the reign of Stephen, may owe its inception to Alfred's influence. At any rate it is in dealing with Alfred's reign that it first begins to discuss events with any measure of fullness. It is a very unequal work, some of the entries being the barest statements of fact; but in telling the story of the wars against the Danes it gives us many passages of simple, vivid narrative.

Unfortunately, Old English prose is for the most part of a strictly expository character. Its greatest exponent, after Alfred, is Ælfric (*circa* 955–1020), Abbot of Eynsham, near Oxford, author of numerous homilies, lives of the saints, and a grammar; and translator of parts of the Bible. Ælfric in many of his works shows an excessive fondness for alliteration, his prose resembling Old English verse broken down. Another homilist is Wulfstan, Archbishop of York, a contemporary of Ælfric.

The development of English prose was checked by the Norman Conquest, which was destined to influence profoundly the course of English Literature in direct and indirect ways, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER II

## EARLY MIDDLE ENGLISH LITERATURE (1066-1350)

Effect of the Norman Conquest on English literature — Anglo-Latin literature — Geoffrey of Monmouth — Anglo-French literature — English literature : Religious works : Chronicles : Romances.

A new beginning.

AT the time of the Norman Conquest the literature of England, both in poetry and prose, was incomparably richer than that of any other European country. Yet for any influence which it exerted on succeeding literature, it might just as well have never existed. It is interesting in itself, it is well worth reading, but in the evolution of our modern literature it counts for nothing. With the Norman Conquest, and in some measure owing to it—although, had there been no Conquest, the same thing would eventually have happened—English literature made a fresh start. With the coming of the Normans it did not, as has frequently been said, go underground for a time to reappear in the fourteenth century the same in essentials. There is no bond of connexion between Cynewulf and Chaucer. The eleventh century saw the exhaustion of the old alliterative poetry, and it is of poetry, rather than of prose, that we have at this time mainly to think. Efforts, it is true, were made to preserve it and revive it, and as late as the fourteenth century we find Langland writing in a loose form of Old English verse; but in this, as in other respects, he was out of touch with prevailing fashion. In the eleventh century English poetry set out to learn a new tune, a new prosody, and new themes; it went to school in French poetry.

There need be no attempt to explain away this fact. English literature has again and again refreshed itself from foreign springs, and if in the sources of its inspiration it owes more to the Latin races than to the Teutonic, a consideration not without its comfort in these days, this is only another reminder that we are a mixed race. And of all the debts which English owes to foreign literature, none is so great as that which it incurred in the Middle Ages to French. Unless this indebtedness is kept constantly in mind, there can be no understanding of Middle English literature; indeed, there can be none of modern English literature either, since the origins of many things, and these not the least important, in that literature are to be found in certain departures of the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth centuries. For the literary historian Middle English literature before Chaucer is excessively important, not so much for any work of outstanding merit which it has given us, as for its promise of what is to come.

The history of Middle English poetry might easily resolve itself into the history of the endeavour to win for English the French elegance and grace, to naturalize in England the



style and the themes of French poetry. Chaucer is the father of English poetry in a stricter sense than that generally attached to such attributions of literary paternity. His poetry is the full and triumphant expression of all that English poetry of the three preceding centuries was trying to be, and in achieving this he follows closely in the steps of those 'that make in France'.

We have to wait for Chaucer till we see all that French literature meant for English. For the English language and English versification in the time between the Conquest and Chaucer were in a state of transition, and, moreover, did not receive that measure of scholarly cultivation which alone could fit them to be the vehicles of a great literature. One of the results of the Norman invasion was to set up French as the language of the upper classes—the classes most capable in those days of producing literature—and to relegate English to an inferior position as the language of the humble and unlettered. At the same time Latin continued, as before the Conquest, to be written and spoken by scholars. The immediate consequences of this state of things were disastrous for English literature. It received a set-back from which it took three centuries to recover. Had all those who wrote in French and Latin as sedulously cultivated the mother-tongue, the recovery might have been much more rapid, but, as it was, the remaking of English versification on the pattern of French—for that is what the new order of things involved—was left in the hands of those who were often least able to accomplish it. Moreover, the condition of the language itself rendered a new literary standard difficult to attain at once. It was rapidly shedding its inflexions, and was taking over many new words from the French. There was, besides, no standard English; there was one English for the north, another for the midlands, and another for the south, all of equal literary importance. From all this it follows that early Middle English literature (1066–1366) is largely experimental work; it is a literature in the making. What we witness is English trying to make a foreign versification its own. Yet the halting achievement of those years made Chaucer's work possible; for, though Chaucer owed little to it in direct inspiration, yet it had done something towards fitting the language for the purposes of literature. Without it, Chaucer might have written in French. He is the first Englishman of genius to write in English. He took over from his English predecessors the language which they had struggled to make a worthy literary medium, and having genius in him, he shaped it to finer issues than they had dreamt of.

Before we consider the works in which this new English literature was finding expression, we must glance at the literature written in Latin and French.

The writings in Latin, in which language so much of the best mediaeval thought found its expression, are of consequence for

Anglo-  
Latin  
Literature  
1066-1350

the student of English literature only in so far as they are the sources of some important books in the vernacular. Without fear of omitting anything of value for our purpose, we can pass by the works of such men as Anselm, John of Salisbury, Alexander Neckham, Robert Grosseteste, Roger Bacon, Richard of Bury, Duns Scotus, and others. Most of these were theologians. The chroniclers, among whom are William of Malmesbury, Henry of Huntingdon, Geoffrey of Monmouth, William of Newburgh, Jocelin of Brakelond, Giraldus Cambrensis, Matthew Paris, Ranulph Higden, are of more importance. Two of them are better known to modern readers than the others, Jocelin of Brakelond, because his chronicle of the Abbey of Bury St. Edmunds had the good fortune to inspire Carlyle's *Past and Present*, and Geoffrey of Monmouth, because his *Historia Regum Britanniae* (circa 1136) first gave literary vogue to the Arthurian legend, and to other stories since made famous. Geoffrey, anxious perhaps to exalt their recently conquered country in the eyes of the Normans, and at the same time to make capital out of the contemporary passion for romance, wrote a history of the British kings from the time of the reputed landing in England of Brutus, descendant of the Trojan Aeneas, to the date of the Saxon invasions. For his purpose he drew on Celtic tradition, or classical story, and, to a much greater extent, on his own imagination, piecing together a very readable and circumstantial narrative, which, needless to say, cannot be regarded as authentic history. It succeeded, however, in passing as such, in spite of the protests of more conscientious chroniclers, and was accepted in all good faith even in the sixteenth century by men like Grafton and Holinshed. In the latter part of his *Historia* Geoffrey recounts the deeds of Arthur the Briton in his war against the Saxon invaders, his subjugation of Scotland, Ireland, and other countries, and his interrupted march on Rome. Thus was the Arthurian legend launched on its victorious career. Although many stories, such as those of Launcelot, Tristram, and the Holy Grail, were only added to it in later days, to Geoffrey belongs the credit of first seeing its literary possibilities. It is in the *Historia*, too, that we first read of Lear and his daughters, of Cymbeline, Sabrina, and Locrine. Fabrication though it is, the book was thus a very potent one, the source of many an English masterpiece. There we read

Geoffrey  
of Mon-  
mouth.

Of Spenser's fairy themes  
And those that Milton loved in youthful years;

and of the themes of many another poet besides. Its virtue was not, however, the discovery of later days; it sprang into fame at once. Soon after its appearance it was translated into French verse by the Anglo-Norman poet, Wace, and Wace's poem, in turn, was rendered into English by Layamon in his *Brut* (circa 1205)—the first noteworthy English book to appear after the Conquest.



The Normans seem to have had a predilection for books of two kinds—the historical and the religious. Several of the Latin chronicles were compiled at the instigation of Norman prelates and statesmen, and several rhyming chronicles exist in Anglo-French, among them being that of Wace, which has just been mentioned. In the same language there are also many religious works, translations and paraphrases of the Bible, saints' lives, and such-like. In the romantic literature of the day the Normans had also a share, and it was in part owing to their agency that the French on the Continent became acquainted with the Celtic stories which figure so prominently in mediæval romance.

Anglo-French  
Literature  
1066-1350

At a later date, in the fourteenth century, many ballads, roundels, virelays, and complaints were written in England in the French language—for example, by Gower—in imitation of contemporary practice across the Channel. These poems are important as indicating the influences which moulded Chaucer's early work.

For a hundred years after the Conquest few books seem to have been written in English; the most notable are in Latin. And when literature in the vernacular comes to life again towards the close of the eleventh century, it accomplishes at first, and for some considerable time, nothing of great intrinsic value, although much that is of historical interest. That interest is mainly linguistic and metrical. It is in the writings of those years that we can trace the establishment of our modern prosody. The linguistic development is of little importance to our present purpose.

English  
Literature  
1066-1350

We may, for convenience' sake, divide the literature from 1066 to 1350 into four sections, comprising religious works, chronicles, romances, and lyrics.<sup>1</sup>

Homilies, lives of the saints, metrical paraphrases of the Bible, and such-like form a very large part of Middle English literature: in this respect the Norman Conquest effected little change in popular taste. They can hardly be said to be more in the main stream of literature than are the published sermons of to-day, although we have to remember that Chaucer made them respectable in one or two edifying verse-tales, and carried on, without improving, the tradition in that 'little thing in prose' with which he pretended to be so pleased. The best that can be said of all these works is that they gave writers practice in adapting the new language to poetic ends, and in handling the new rhyming measures. In these respects, and in these alone, do they count among the processes which made Chaucer's work possible.

Religious  
Works.

One of the earliest of these religious writings is the *Bestiary* (circa 1200), an allegorical interpretation of the characters of certain animals. It is interesting because it shows a curious mingling of two different prosodic systems—on the one hand the alliterative, unrhymed verse of Old English with its

<sup>1</sup> The lyrics are held over for discussion in a subsequent chapter.

irregularly placed stresses, and uncertain number of unstressed syllables, and on the other, the more regular rhyming metres of French. The description of the lion shows the former :

Ðe leun stant on hillē ; and he man hūnten herē,  
 Oðer ðurg his nesē smel, smakē ðat he neggō,  
 Bi wilc weie so he wilē to delē nider wenden,  
 Alle hisē fet steppēs after him he filled.

The latter is evident in the internal and terminal rhymes of the passage on the eagle :

Al is man so is tis ern, wuldē ge nu listen,  
 Old in his sinnēs dern, or he bicumedð cristen.

Each half line is here practically a six- (or seven-) syllabled line with three stresses. It represents the metre of the French *Bestiary*, and is seen again in such a passage as this, from the description of the whale :

Ceðegrande is a fis  
 Ðe moste ðat in water is ;  
 Ðat ðu wuldes seien get,  
 Gef ðu it soge wan it flet,  
 Ðat it were an eilond  
 Ðat sete one ðe se sond.

The more regular iambic movement, imitated from French (and, in part, probably from mediaeval Latin hymns), is here apparent, although from the beginning this new English verse kept some of the freedom of Old English verse, and did not adopt the strict syllabic uniformity of French.

It has seemed worth while to quote these examples, as they show better than pages of dissertation what English, after the Norman Conquest, had to learn. It took, as we have said, some time to learn it, and cannot be said to have learned it thoroughly till Chaucer appeared. Layamon's *Brut*, of which more will be said in the next section, was written about the same time as the *Bestiary*, and shows the same vacillation between two different prosodies. The *Ormulum* (circa 1200), so called, as its author tells us, ' forrpi patt Orrm itt wrohhte ', is a long dreary poem, consisting of paraphrases of the gospels and homilies upon them. It is written in a phonetic spelling of Orm's own devising, discards the respective ornaments of Old English and of French verse, alliteration and rhyme, and exhibits a monotonously regular iambic rhythm. Its lines consist of fifteen syllables, with a marked pause after the eighth, and represent an adaptation of the Latin *septenarius*. The same metre, with rhyme added, is employed in the *Moral Ode*, a kind of versified sermon. *Genesis and Exodus* (circa 1250), a paraphrase of the opening books of the Bible, is written in octosyllabic couplets, the commonest metre of mediaeval poetry. From all this it will be seen that, by the middle of the thirteenth century, the new measures were well established, although much had yet to be done in extending and improving



them. Certain of the didactic and religious poems adopt the form of dialogue so common in all European countries throughout the Middle Ages. *The Debate of the Body and Soul* develops in eloquent stanzas a recurrent mediaeval theme. *The Owl and the Nightingale* (circa 1220) is a spirited 'flyting' between the two birds, in which satire and railing are leavened with a good deal of serious comment upon life. The cult of the Virgin inspired a number of other poems, chief among which is the *Good Orison of Our Lady* (circa 1225). The wisdom of the people takes shape in *The Proverbs of Hendyng*, which are set forth in seven-lined stanzas with the added refrain, 'Quoth Hendyng'.

Passing over much other religious and didactic verse, we may single out for notice three works belonging to the first half of the fourteenth century. The *Cursor Mundi*—

Cursur o werld man aght it call,  
For almost it overrennes all

—is written in octosyllables, and is a history of the world from the Creation to the Day of Judgment. It thus covers much the same ground as the Miracle Plays, which were very popular in that district of northern England in which it was written. In an interesting preface the author explains that the book was written as a counter-attraction to the love romances; he will write in praise not of earthly, but of heavenly, love, not of

Tristrem and hys leif Ysote  
How he for here becom a sote,

and such-like, but of the Virgin Mary. *Handlyng Synne*, by Robert Mannyng of Brunne, a translation in octosyllables from the French, and *The Pricke of Conscience*, also in octosyllables, and possibly by Richard Rolle of Hampole, follow the usual manner of the mediaeval homily.

In books designed to illustrate the history of the English language, these poems deservedly play an important part; but, from a literary standpoint, they are of quite minor importance, except, as we have said, for reasons of metre.

Middle English prose is of even less consequence; for a long time to come the best prose was to be written in Latin. The vernacular prose of the period is wholly devoted to religious purposes, to prose homilies and saints' lives. The only work which rises above mediocrity is the *Anceren Riwle* (circa 1200), written to instruct nuns in their duties. It offers a lively, and at times unintentionally amusing, account of monastic life, and is informed with a large-hearted charity, as engaging as it is rare in mediaeval writings. *The Ayenbite of Inwit*, or *Remorse of Conscience* (circa 1340) is a tedious work of edification, badly translated from the French. More noteworthy are the prose writings of Richard Rolle of Hampole, which include a commentary on the Psalms, and the finely mystical *Ego dormio et cor meum vigilat*.

Chronicles All the historical, or quasi-historical, information contained in Latin and French chronicles was very soon made accessible to English readers in certain verse narratives. The first of these is the *Brut* (*circa* 1205) of Layamon, a priest of Ernley, on the banks of the Severn. He tells us how 'it came to him in mind, to tell the noble deeds of England', and how 'he journeyed wide over the land and procured the noble books which he took as pattern'. The chief of these books was that 'which a French clerk made, who was named Wace; he well could write and he gave it to the noble Eleanor, high King Henry's queen'. The *Brut*, which runs to more than thirty-two thousand lines, is a free rendering of Wace's verse translation of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia*. Layamon does not follow his original slavishly, but makes several important additions, especially to the account of the coming and passing of Arthur, and to the story of the Round Table. The sources of this additional matter have not yet been identified, but are probably to be found in Welsh oral tradition. Interesting as the poem is, as the first great monument of the English language after the Conquest, and as being the first account in English of Arthur, it has little poetic merit. It is written for the most part in the old alliterative verse, deviating here and there into the new rhyming metres. From a prosodic point of view it has thus the same interest for us as has the *Bestiary*.

About a century after the *Brut* appeared another verse chronicle, that of Robert of Gloucester (*circa* 1300), which also begins with the Trojan landing and ends with the year 1271. Robert's sources are the Latin chronicles of his day. His enthusiastic praise of England—'England is a very good land, I ween of all lands the best'—has won for the book more respect than can be justified by its poetic quality. A verse chronicle (*circa* 1340) has also been left by Robert Mannyng, author of *Handlyng Synne*.

Romances  
—General  
Character-  
istics. Of the books in Middle English—religious and historical, or quasi-historical—which we have been reviewing, none are great in themselves, or give any promise of great things to come. Their subject-matter tells against them, and even when that is right, as in Layamon's *Brut*, the workmanship is lacking. The interest of these poems is, as we have said, largely metrical; they exhibit the gradual establishment of a new prosody which only waited for a man of genius to be turned to good account. That man appeared in Chaucer. The case is different with the romances. For even if the best of the English romances fall far short of the superlatively excellent, and if the worst of them are very bad indeed, still the themes, however crudely handled, have their attraction, for they have had the good fortune to beget much great work of a later day. Were it only on the question of 'origins'—not always an enthralling question but here more enthralling than usual—the early English romances would demand respect. Here most surely



we have the beginnings of the modern novel: here the theme of Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*, of the epic which the youthful Milton planned, and Dryden had a mind to write: here, too, we have the inspiration of many a poem, of many an immortal passage in English literature, such as a very famous one of Burke's in his *Reflections on the French Revolution*, or as the great simile in *Paradise Lost*:

What resounds

In Fable or Romance of Uther's son  
 Begirt with British and Armoric Knights:  
 And all who since, baptized or infidel,  
 Jousted at Aspramont or Montalban,  
 Damasco or Marocco or Trebisonde,  
 Or whom Biserta sent from Afric shore  
 When Charlemain with all his peerage fell  
 By Fontarabbia.

We have already discovered, when discussing *Beowulf*, the nature of the older poetry of the Teutonic peoples, a poetry which we designate heroic or epic, growing out of national happenings, and possessing or suggesting a solid background of historic fact. By the eleventh century this poetry had done its work, its day was past, and a new order of society, with different ideals and aspirations, demanded a different form of expression. The heroic age gave place to the age of chivalry, and heroic poetry was displaced by romance. The literature which now made an appeal is a literature in which love and adventure and chivalry are the ruling motives.

It is significant of the change which marks the passage from heroic poetry to romance that women play a conspicuous part in much of the new literature. In heroic poetry the hero fights for some solid advantage, for plunder, or in defence of his country, or for territory: the knight of romance fights under the banner of his lady-love and seeks adventures merely 'in hope to stonden in his lady grace'. The love motive plays little part in heroic poetry: it is the leading motive in romance.<sup>1</sup>

In this new romantic poetry France led the way. Writing under the general influence of the spirit of the age, the age of chivalry and the crusades, and under the special influence of the love-poets of Provence (the troubadours), French poets sought far and wide for stories which might be made to mirror the life of their time and embody its ideals. Charlemagne and his paladins, King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table, Alexander the Great, the Trojan War, tales from Celtic folklore, from Greek romance, the marvels of the East, stories from English tradition made known through the agency of the Normans—these were some of the themes of the romances. Everything is interpreted in the light of mediaeval ideas. If it is a tale of Troy, we get knights and castles and tournaments and love-lore. Chaucer's *Knight's Tale* is a story of Thebes but the trappings of the story are entirely romantic, or, if

Romances  
—French  
Influence.

<sup>1</sup> See W. P. Ker, *Epic and Romance*.

classical in origin, are mediaevalized in the most fantastic manner. 'Mail-clad knights, "cote armour" by which their rank is known to "heraudes", lists and tourneys and chapels, "haukes sitting on the perche above and houndes liggng on the floor below", these things blend into a picture strangely different from that presented in the clear, sunlit pages of Homer. But more striking still is the difference in spirit due to the mediaeval cult of chivalry and love. Pity and love and generosity in war govern the action in the story from beginning to end in a manner which Homer could not have understood.'<sup>1</sup>

Romances  
—Charle-  
magne  
and  
Arthur.

The romances grouped round the name of Charlemagne—the *chansons de geste*, as they are called in France—are epic in origin, and represent the heroic poetry of the French nation. However much historical facts may be confused in them, they have a basis in history, and retain to the end some of the qualities of heroic poetry. In them the crusading zeal of the day found its expression. As time went on they came more and more under the influence of the more popular romances, and some of the later examples are hardly to be distinguished from pure romance. Of more widespread appeal were the Arthurian stories in which writers were in no way restricted by a respect for history, and were at liberty to invent what they pleased. Arthur was, indeed, a historical person, a British warrior who in the fifth century successfully fought against the Saxon invaders of his country. He became a national hero, and, as in the case of other national heroes, there gathered round his name a mass of legend, much of it transferred from other heroes and even deities, to swell his fame. By the twelfth century he had become a half-mythical, half-historical figure, when Geoffrey of Monmouth took up some of these floating legends, and, inventing where legend failed, fashioned for him a career that might please Norman readers. He pictured Arthur as a gallant warrior, the monarch of a splendid court, the *beau idéal* of chivalry. The process begun by Geoffrey was carried further by French poets of the same century. In their hands Arthur becomes the King of some vague undefined land, surrounded by a band of knights whose business it is to uphold the chivalrous code. Many legends, drawn from Celtic folk-lore, were worked into the Arthurian story, and so Launcelot, Tristram, and others became members of the Round Table. More and more the legends become the vehicles of chivalrous ideas and ideals. To Chrestien de Troyes, a French poet living in the twelfth century at the court of Champagne, we owe more than to any one else the refined and chivalrous tone of the Arthurian romances. 'By him they were more than ever impregnated with the Provençal ideas that dominated the society of the time. The old stories that he found ready at hand Chrestien used as vehicles of tender sentiment and beautiful description. He pictured in them the brilliant life at the court of Champagne. . . . He lingers gladly

<sup>1</sup> Dixon and Grierson, *The English Parnassus*, pp. 710-11.



over banquets and tournaments, and describes with fond care the costumes of ladies and the armour of knights; but above all he loves to analyse the emotions of his characters when in perplexing positions, and to study their shifting states of mind.<sup>1</sup> Chrestien's romances are the sentimental novels of his time, written for women, and much given to the analysis of love. The Grail legend was also added to the Arthurian legend in the twelfth century. It is probably of Celtic origin, the Grail being originally a magic talisman. It was identified by some one bent on turning the romance to purposes of edification—by Robert de Boron or Walter Map—with the cup in which Joseph of Arimathea caught the blood as it flowed from Christ's wounds on the Cross. He who would receive a sight of the Grail must be without fear and without reproach. The quest of the Grail became the supreme quest, a quest spiritual not material, a symbol of man's ceaseless striving after perfection. Thus were the ideals of Christian asceticism imported into the legend. 'What the *Pilgrim's Progress* centuries after did for Protestantism', it has been well said, 'the Holy Grail did for mediaeval Catholicism. It put religion into a story of aspiration, struggle, and attainment.'

Before discussing the romances in detail, we may draw attention to an important matter of prosody, which concerns not only them but the remaining English poetry of their period. The steps by which rhyme and the new metre established themselves in English and ousted the Old English alliterative verse, have been outlined earlier in this volume. It has been shown that in the twelfth-century *Bestiary* the two forces are struggling for mastery, and that by the end of that century the new one had prevailed. Its triumph remained complete for over a hundred years, but it becomes pertinent to our present inquiry to discuss here, by way of anticipation, an attempt which was made about the middle of the fourteenth century, chiefly in the north-west of England and in Scotland, to revive the Old-English principle of alliteration. The metrical forms resulting from this effort were several: the chief of them will be illustrated throughout the remainder of this chapter. In some cases a long rhymeless line was used, modelled on the Anglo-Saxon alliterative line with four stresses and a strong central pause; but in this case there is a marked difference between the Old English rhythm and the Middle English, which seems to have been strongly affected by the new metrical influences. In other cases the succession of rhymeless alliterative lines is broken at intervals by the occurrence of rhyming tags or 'wheels', of a kind to be illustrated later; or alliteration is combined with rhyme and stanza-form, generally with the 'wheel' added. All of these varieties, together with the metrical, are employed in

Middle  
English  
Prosody.

<sup>1</sup> W. H. Schofield, *English Literature from the Conquest to Chaucer*, p. 176.



the romances presently to be noticed. It should be carefully remarked that the practice of alliteration itself is a revival rather than a survival<sup>1</sup>; that, though in the present scheme of treatment the alliterative and the metrical romances are discussed together, the former are all later than the earliest of the latter; and that alliteration, in the sense just defined, fought a losing fight, surviving longer in Scotland than in England, but giving way even there before the beginning of the sixteenth century to the more potent forces of rhyme and the metre that bore it company.

Romances dealing with English Themes. The oldest extant romance written in our language, *The Geste of King Horn* (circa 1250), has an English theme and setting though it is based on an Anglo-French *chanson de geste*. Its story has its analogues in many other romances: it is that of a hero driven forth from his lawful country and undergoing adventures of love and war in a strange land till his valour wins him a bride and the lordship of his kingdom. The tale, which was doubtless Norse in origin, has its scene in north-western England and in Ireland. Told in some 1,500 three-stress lines, rhymed in couplets, it contains spirited passages—notably that in which Horn, disguised as a palmer, gains access to Rimenhild's wedding feast, and rescues her from her unwelcome bridegroom. Another very famous romance with an English theme is *Havelock the Dane*, which is written in rhyming couplets, and probably dates from the beginning of the fourteenth century. Though it is based upon two Norman-French poems, these had originally been worked up from an Anglo-Saxon source. Havelock has been identified with the historical Anlaf Cuaran, the adversary of Athelstan in Northumbria, but the incidents related in the poem are mainly mythical. There are vigour and charm in the passages which tell how Havelock was saved by the good fisherman, Grim, from his evil guardian Godard, and how he did menial work in England till he won for wife the Princess Goldborough, and gained the lordship of two kingdoms. Throughout the poem there are such snatches of poetry as that describing the death of good King Birkabeyn:

He that wille none forbear  
Rich ne povre, king ne kayzere,  
Death, took him when he best wilde  
Liven.

Two English romances, *Beves of Hampton* (circa 1300) and *Guy of Warwick* (circa 1330), had enormous vogue in their own day and for centuries afterwards. The theme of *Beves* is the old one of exile, strange adventure, and return. *Beves*

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Professor Saintsbury: 'nobody has yet produced an English poem of the slightest importance in alliterative measure dating even probably between 1210 and 1340.' His *History of English Prosody*, vol. i, pp. 89-111, contains an admirably clear and complete account of the metres used in the English romances.

has incurred the wrath of his mother, who had previously procured his father's murder at the hands of her paramour, the Emperor of Almaine. Like Havelock, he is saved by the man who has been ordered to kill him, and, like Havelock too, he journeys abroad and gains a princess for his bride. But Beves has far wilder and more miraculous adventures than the Danish hero, killing among other beings a boar, a dragon, and two lions, besides innumerable Saracens. He subdues the giant Ascopart, who subsequently turns traitor to him; and he marries King Ermin's daughter, the charming Josiane:

So fair she was and bright of mod  
As snow upon the rede blod.

The romance contains many quaint strokes: thus Beves regards it as a reflection on his manhood that Josiane should hold back one of the lions while he is killing the other. In another passage, mistaking her motive, he expresses a wish that she were as loyal as his good horse Arundel, which, with his sword Morglay, helps him mightily in all his perils. The chief incident of *Guy of Warwick* is his combat with the giant Colbrand, whom he slays, thus breaking the power of the Danes; but before this event, which raised him to the position of a national hero, Guy had undertaken many perilous adventures in Europe, at the hest of his imperious mistress, Felice. His romance is not nearly as interesting or spirited as that of Beves, but its strong nationalism and the abundance of its martial episodes gave it a great vogue in England. The *Tale of Gamelyn* (circa 1350) is an admirable romance composed in the variety of common metre associated with Robert of Gloucester. It describes the adventures of a younger brother driven to the woodland by the cruelty of an elder, and winning success in the end through his own stout heart and strong hand. The theory which attributes this poem to Chaucer is discussed in a later chapter. Rehandled in Lodge's *Rosalynd*, *Gamelyn* helps to make the plot of *As You Like It*. *John the Reeve* represents a theme dear to the popular heart, and familiar in many later tales and ballads, the adventure of an English king with a man of the people, who entertains him unawares.

But the English romances which are at once finest in point of poetry, and most imbued with the national spirit, are not the Anglo-Saxon, but those which cast back to the older 'matter of Britain'. Their origin and general character have already been discussed. Some of them are heroic and deal chiefly with fighting, keeping love in the background: others are romantic, and have love for their prevailing theme. The contrast may be emphasized by a comparison of two romances, both of which describe Arthur's death, and are entitled *Morte Arthure*. The first is written in the long rhymeless alliterative line of four accents, and is chiefly concerned with the victorious

Arthurian  
Romances



battles fought by Arthur immediately before his death, against the Emperor of Rome, the Duke of Lorraine, and other foemen. The last fight against Modred, and the passing of the King are also described, but in language which seems pale beside Malory's splendid narrative of the same great happenings. Other incidents of the poem, however, are admirably told—notably Arthur's reception of the Roman envoys at Carlyon-on-Usk, Gawain's combat with Sir Priamus, and the refusal of Sir Idras to leave Arthur in the mellay when he is ordered to save his own father. There are some fine psychological strokes at the end—notably those which express the remorse of Modred for the killing of Gawain, and the sorrow of Arthur over his dead knights. But the romance of love is almost wholly lacking, and there is little subtlety in the drawing of Guenever, who takes the veil at the end, not in remorse or for love of Christ, but 'alle for falsede and frawde, and fear of her loverde'.<sup>1</sup> There is no lack of love, however, in the earlier *Morte Arthure*, a rhyming poem in eight-lined stanzas. Here Launcelot plays a leading part, and appears both as the beloved of Elaine and the lover of the queen, whose honour and life he saves in battle. He and she, however, are betrayed by Sir Agravaine, whom Launcelot kills, thus incurring the fierce wrath of his victim's brother, Gawain. The description of Arthur's last fight and passing is at once fuller and finer than that given in the alliterative romance, and contains many episodes familiar to readers of Malory and Tennyson.<sup>2</sup>

In view of the subsequent fame of Launcelot in England, and of his popularity in contemporary French poetry, it is

<sup>1</sup> Arthur's ambiguous last message to her is worth noting: 'zife Waynor hafe wele wroghte, wele hir betydde.'

<sup>2</sup> e.g. the following one:

The knight was bothè hende and free,  
 To save that sword he was full glad,  
 And thought, whether I better be  
 If never man it after had:  
 An I it caste into the see,  
 Of mold was never man so mad.  
 The sword he hid under a tree  
 And said, 'Sir, I did as ye me bad.'  
 'What saw thou there?' then said the king,  
 'Tell me now, if thou me can:.'  
 'Certes, sir,' he said, 'nothing  
 But waters deep and waves wan.'  
 'Ah, now thou haste broke my bidding,  
 Why hast thou do so, thou false man?  
 Another bode thou must me bring.'  
 Then carefully the knight forth ran  
 And thought the sword yet he would hide,  
 And cast the scabbard in the flood.



remarkable that he figures but seldom as the leading figure in an English romance. The Scottish *Lancelot of the Laik*, of which he is the hero, is late and inferior work: in England his fame is eclipsed by that of Gawain, who appears in numerous romances, and always as a brave, honourable, and courteous knight, free of the sinister characteristics which have been assigned to him by later poets. He is the hero of what is generally admitted to be the finest romance in the language, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, a poem composed in batches of alliterative four-accent lines, having anapaestic rhythm, and separated by rhyming and alliterative tags of the 'bob and wheel' type. It describes the marvellous adventures of Gawain with a huge knight, clad all in green, who enters Arthur's hall at Camelot, and suffers himself to be beheaded by our hero on the understanding that he shall be allowed to return the blow in a year's time. He rides off with his head in his hand, and in due course Gawain seeks him out, achieving many adventures by the way. Lighting on the castle of a hospitable knight, he becomes his guest, and is submitted by the knight's wife to a trial of chastity. From this he emerges almost wholly victorious, receiving from her only a kiss and a fair girdle. When his ordeal arrives he finds that his host and the green knight are one, and he is let off lightly, and even given honour, for his honourable conduct. Apart from its high spirit of chivalry and courage, the romance is precious for its poetry and colour, its vivid descriptions of feasting, fighting and hunting, and its keen sense of natural beauty.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf. the following stanza, which will serve to illustrate the metre of the poem, and the kind of metre which might be devised by the romancers in general:

After the sesoun of somer with the soft windes,  
 When zephyrus sifles himself on sedes and erbes,  
 Wela-wynne is the wort that waxes ther-oute  
 When the donkande dew dropes of the leves,  
 To bide a blisful blush of the bright sunne,  
 But then hies harvest, and hardens him sone  
 Warnes him for the winter to wax full ripe;  
 He drives with droght the dust for to rise,  
 Fro the face of the folde to flie full high,  
 Wrath wind of the welkin wresteles with the sunne,  
 The leaves lancen fro the linde, and lighten on the grounde,  
 And all grays the grass, that grene was ere;  
 Then all ripes and rotes that rose upon first,  
 And thus runs the year in yesterdays mony,  
 And Winter winds again, as the world askes

No sage,  
 Til Michelmes mone  
 Was cumen with Winter wage,  
 Then thenkkes Gawain full sone  
 Of his anious voyage.

Gawain figures again in the *Awyntyrs (Adventures) of Arthur* (circa 1350), an admirable northern romance, employing both rhyme and alliteration. His combat with Galleroun, Prince of Galloway, is the chief matter of the poem; but perhaps its finest passage is the early one which describes the dream of Guenever, and begins thus :

All but Sir Gawain, graythest of alle,  
 He leves with Dame Gaynour in those groves greene,  
 Under a laurel she lay, that lady so smalle,  
 Of box and of barborane, biggit full bene.

Chief among the remaining romances dealing with Gawain are *Golagros and Gawain*, *The Wedding of Gawain*, *The Jest of Sir Gawain*, and *The Avowing of King Arthur, Sir Gawain, Sir Kay, and Sir Baldwin of Britain*. Gawain's son, Guinglain, is the hero of an interesting romance in stanzas—*Libeaus Desconus (Le Beau Déconnu : The Fair Unknown)*. Guinglain, after many magical adventures, finally rescues with a kiss a lady condemned by wizardry to take the form of a serpent. In *Ywain and Gawain*, a fine romance in couplets adapted from the *Chevalier au Lion* of Chrestien de Troyes, Gawain plays only a minor part. The poem deals chiefly with the adventures of Ywain, who, after manifold perils, weds the fair lady Laudine, and becomes the defender of the fountain perilous of Broceliande.

It is curious that the tale of Tristram and Iseult, which has played so great a part in the later story of the world, should be but poorly represented among the early English romances. The sole considerable version in which it is preserved is the northern—though probably not Scottish—poem, *Sir Tristrem*, which was in all likelihood composed near the end of the thirteenth century. Its metre is a complicated eleven-line rhyming stanza, with the ninth line foreshortened. In the opening lines the author says that he had the tale from Thomas of Ercildoune, whose misty and probably legendary personality is discussed elsewhere in this volume. Probably this ascription had a twofold reason. There already existed in England an Anglo-French romance on the subject of Tristram, written by one Thomas; and the later poem would certainly gain in popularity if it were attributed to a well-known author. The poem itself is inferior, and the relation of its narrative to the world-famous story need not concern us here; but it is a noteworthy fact that the Tristram legend was extant in Britain before the Conquest, and that in Britain, too, were composed the two French versions which preserved it, and enabled it to become one of the chief glories of European literature.<sup>1</sup> Not till the coming of Malory is it greatly handled in English.

Malory, too, was the first English author to tell greatly the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Schofield, *English Literature from the Norman Conquest to Chaucer*, pp. 201-14.



legend of the Holy Grail, though this, like the Tristram legend, almost certainly had its origin in Britain, and had been welded together there at a very early date. Before Malory's day it had been developed in Britain in the Anglo-French of Walter de Map and Robert de Boron, and on the Continent it had been taken up by Chrestien de Troyes and Wolfram von Eschenbach, and had inspired a vast literature. With the details of this we are not here concerned; but we are concerned with two figures closely connected with the Grail legend, Percival and Merlin, both of whom become the heroes of English romances. Though Percival had been 'the first achiever of the Grail' in the early French and German versions of the legend, no mention of it occurs in *Sir Perceval of Galles*, a late fourteenth-century poem written in lengthy stanzas with tail-rhyme. Here Percival slays a Red Knight who has murdered his father, and after many perils and exploits he wins the fair Lufamour of Maiden-land for his bride. *Arthur and Merlin*, a romance of great merit, extending to over 10,000 lines, and written in couplets, probably belongs to the very end of the thirteenth century, or the beginning of the fourteenth. It contains much description of Arthur's court and battles: the most interesting episodes relating to Merlin are those telling of his wondrous birth, and his enchantment by the fair Ninian. Like *Libeaus.Desconus* and many other of the Arthurian romances, *Arthur and Merlin* is particularly rich in the Celtic element of mystery. In the fifteenth century the tales of Merlin and the Grail were retold in two couplet poems of great length and dullness by a skinner named Henry Lonelich.

Somewhat apart, but still belonging to the 'matter of Britain', come a group of Breton lays translated into English from French originals. The best of these have remarkable charm and grace. Two of them, *Lamwell* and *Le Freine*, are adapted from extant French poems of Marie de France, whose rhyming octosyllables they retain. *Lamwell* is a tale of glamour describing the chequered loves of a mortal and a fay. Toward the middle of the fifteenth century it was exquisitely rehandled in stanzas by Thomas Chestre under the title of *Sir Lounfal*. The theme of faerie recurs with a different development in *Sir Degare* and *Sir Gowghter*, two admirable romances of the early fourteenth century. *Le Freine* and *Emaré* both tell, though after widely different fashions, the tale of a woman wronged and outcast, yet in the end restored to love and happiness. In *The Earl of Toulouse*, a romance in lengthy rhymed stanzas, a queen prevails over her traducers, and, after a dreadful ordeal, wins her lover. Also of Breton origin is *Sir Orfeo*—or in its Scottish form *Orfeo and Heurodis*—one of the most beautiful of all the romances. Orpheus here becomes a king of the Celtic Wonderland, and harps his wife away from the clutch of a fairy king, without losing her at the end. The tale is told with the utmost delicacy and grace,



and contains some delightful descriptions of Nature<sup>1</sup> and fairyland.

Charle-  
magne  
Romances

The English Charlemagne romances are in most cases adapted from the French *chansons de geste*, and thus deal chiefly with fighting. They are few and inferior: most of them may be assigned to the very end of the fourteenth century, and are written in rhyming stanzas of various length. The main incident of *Sir Ferumbras* is Oliver's combat with a heathen giant whom he eventually overcomes and has baptized. *Roland and Vernagu* and *Roland and Otuel* both celebrate the prowess of Oliver's fellow-paladin against Saracen foemen. Other aspects of the Charlemagne story are dealt with in *The Siege of Milan* and *The Soudone of Babylon*. The alliterative *Rauf Coilyear* belongs to the same class as *John the Reeve*, and describes with much spirit the rough and ready entertainment given by the 'collier' to the disguised Charlemagne. In one passage Ralph reproves the king for lack of courtesy, and hits him 'under the eir with the richt hand'. The latter part of the poem describes with great gusto Ralph's return visit to the king. The humour and popular sympathies of *Rauf Coilyear* show that it was intended for the *bourgeoisie*, and it thus falls into quite a different class from the graver and more aristocratic *chansons de geste*.

Romances  
of An-  
tiquity.

The general characteristics of 'the Matter of Greece and Rome' have been discussed earlier in this chapter. The legend of Troy had been given a new and elaborate development through the Middle Ages in the writings of the mythical Dictys Cretensis and Dares Phrygius, and the historical Benoît de Sainte-More and Guido delle Colonne. Its interest for Englishmen lay largely in the conviction which they had derived from Geoffrey of Monmouth and others, that their race had sprung from the loins of Brutus, the supposed descendant of Aeneas. The 'tale of Troy divine' therefore became in some sense a British national theme. It is doubtless to the belief just cited that we owe the existence of the first English version of the Troy story, the *Geste Hystoriale of the Destruction of Troy*. This is an alliterative poem of 14,000 lines, translated, possibly before the end of the fourteenth century, from the *Historia Destructionis Troiae* of Guido delle Colonne. Despite its length and discursiveness, much of it may be read with pleasure, and it contains some admirable descriptions of warfare, adventure, and love. The matter of Troy received a new and notable development in the hands of Chaucer, Lydgate, and Caxton, in connexion with whom it will again be

<sup>1</sup> Cf.

Bifel so in the comesing of May,  
When merry and hot is the day,  
And away beth winter showers,  
And every field is full of flowers,  
And blossom breme on every bough  
Over all waxeth merry enow.

discussed. The matter of Thebes is later to become the subject of Chaucer's *Knights Tale* and Lydgate's *Story of Thebes*.

The life of Alexander, with its mediaeval accretions of legend, is the subject of a particularly fine romance, *King Alisaunder*, which extends to nearly 10,000 lines in couplets, and was probably completed before the end of the thirteenth century. It is based on the huge French *Roman d'Alexandre*, transmitted through the Norman-French version of Eustace of Kent. Naturally its chief themes are fighting and conquest, but it deals largely in marvels, and has great vigour and richness of colour. Some have attributed it to the author of *Arthur and Merlin*. The Alexander story or legend was rehandled in certain alliterative poems, or fragments of poems, composed during the middle of the fourteenth century, and was developed at a length of 14,000 lines in the Scottish *Buik of Alexander the Great*, which may conceivably have been the work of John Barbour.

Many Eastern tales or lays were floating through Europe at this period, and certain of them are preserved in English story or romance. Of this type is Chaucer's *Squire's Tale*:

The story of Cambuscan bold,  
Of Camball and of Algarsife,  
And who had Canace to wife.

To Byzantine story belongs *Floris and Blancheflur*, one of the earliest of all the English romances, which describes in couplets the fortunes of a pair who had been lovers even as children, but had been cruelly separated. They are united, after many adventures, in Babylon, where the girl has become the slave of an autocratic, but in the end beneficent, admiral. The following lines, in which the admiral unites the lovers, illustrate the style and metre of the poem:

The Admiral tho, wel him betide,  
That child he sette by his side,  
And hath forgive his wrathe bo,  
Floris and Blancheflur also,  
And said with him hi scholde be  
The beste of alle his meinie.  
And Floris he made stand upright,  
And there he dubbed him to knight.  
Now bothe togadere thes childre for blisse  
Falle to his fet, hem to kisse.

Many of the romances deal with themes lying outside the four classic divisions just cited. *Richard Cœur de Lion*, an excellent English couplet-poem of the late thirteenth century, was doubtless written in its original Anglo-French in order to satisfy the patriotic instincts of Englishmen. Its account of Richard's miraculous birth is interesting, as showing how soon after the death of an historical character legend could be woven round his life. The particularly charming French romance, *Parthenopeus de Blois*, appears in English in a fragmentary translation

Miscellaneous  
Romances



of considerable merit. In *Ypomedon*, *Amis and Amiloun*, and *Generides*, a romance of late origin, fighting and adventure are fairly equally blended with love: the second poem is exquisite. *William of Palerne*, also a translation, is the tale of a good were-wolf, who, like Mowgli's foster-brothers, brings a mortal safe through many perils. *The Squire of Low Degree*, a late metrical romance apparently of English origin, tells delightfully the tale of a princess who is faithful throughout great trials to her brave and chivalrous, but less than royal, suitor. *The Pistyl of Susan*, a rhymed alliterative romance, written in eight-line stanzas<sup>1</sup> with added 'bob and wheel', retells with quaint charm and colour the story of Susanna and the elders.

Tales in  
Verse.

During the Middle Ages there were in circulation throughout Europe a number of tales which cannot be properly classified as romances, though some of them approach the romance in form and theme. Many of them had a moral or religious aim: others, especially those of the *fabliau* type, were frankly and sometimes grossly entertaining. In a work of larger scope the English tales of both these kinds would demand fuller notice: here we can do little more than call attention to their existence. Several of them are preserved in the *Canterbury Tales*. The stories of the Pardoner, the Merchant, and the Manciple are obviously Eastern in origin,<sup>2</sup> and so are many non-Chaucerian stories—notably the admirable metrical tale of *Dame Siriz*, which combines a domestic situation with the Oriental belief in the transmigration of souls. Tales of beasts, as we have already seen, had been early told in the thirteenth-century *Bestiary*, and are to be told again in the verse of Holland and Henryson. The French *Roman de Renart* supplies the material of the early English metrical poem, *The Vox and the Wolf*, and of Chaucer's Nun's Priest's tale. *Sir Amadace* and *Sir Oleges* have been sometimes classified as romances, possibly on account of their titles, but

<sup>1</sup> The following passage may be quoted as illustrating the general type of stanza used in many of the alliterative romances:

Now is Susan in sale, sengeliche arayed,  
 In a silken schert, with schoulders wel schene.  
 Tho rose up with rancour the renkes reneyed,  
 This comelich accused with wordes wel kene;  
 Homliche on her heved her hendes they leyed,  
 And heo wepte for wo, no wonder, I wene.  
 We shall presenten this plaint, how thou ever be paid,  
 And sei sadliche the soth, right as we have seen,  
 On sake.

Thus with cauteles waynt,  
 Priestes presented this playnt,  
 Yet shall trouthe them ataynt  
 I dar undertake.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Schofield, p. 321.



might better be described as spirited tales, each with an attached moral. Many of the tales existed in collections. Reference is made elsewhere in these pages to the *Gesta Romanorum*; but as the more current, and possibly the original, form of this huge work is Latin, it cannot here be discussed in detail. *The Seven Sages of Rome*, previously current in Latin and French versions, is reproduced in a thirteenth-century English poem of some 4,000 lines. It is a series of stories told in competition by a wicked queen, who, Phaedra-like, wishes to bring her step-son to doom, and by the seven wise men who wish to save him.

### CHAPTER III

#### PROSE, 1350-1400

Wyclif, Trevisa, Mandeville.

<sup>1</sup> WITH two notable exceptions the prose writings of Englishmen during the latter half of the fourteenth century are important rather through their bearing on the development of our literature, than for any great force and beauty of their own. During this period English was gradually asserting itself, as the medium of official communication, against Latin, the universal and learned language, and French, the national speech of the Norman conqueror. During the last quarter of the century it had, in large measure, supplanted its rivals in parliament, at the royal court, and in the law courts. The gradual adoption of the vernacular by the learned and popular classes soon spread to the schools, where by 1385 French had been wellnigh superseded as the medium of instruction.

Victory of  
the Vernacular.

The change was bound to affect literature speedily, and was accelerated by the strong desire of certain religious reformers that the people should be enabled to read the Scriptures in their own tongue. For a long while partial translations of it had existed in the monasteries for the use of the initiated; but the first complete Bible written in the English language and intended for the commonalty is that attributed to John Wyclif (1320 ?-1384). There is fair traditional evidence that he had a chief hand in the two versions translated successively from the Vulgate, and known as the 'Wyclifite': if he had, it would be quite in keeping with his strong and ever-increasing desire to simplify religion and bring it into touch with popular life. Yet this evidence does not amount to certainty; and in any case very much of the work must have been carried out by his disciples. On the other hand, it seems beyond doubt that if Wyclif did not actually share in the translation, he inspired it, and thus did a mighty service both to religion and literature. In view of the undeveloped state of the language at this period, the Wyclif Bible obviously

Wyclif.

<sup>1</sup> The prose of Chaucer is noticed in Chapter V.

cannot claim the absolute value given to the later Authorized Version by its consummate qualities of spirit and style; but the second Wyclifite text, which is much more finished and vigorous than the first, is, historically speaking, an achievement of the first importance.

Many other writings which are beyond all doubt Wyclif's, are in Latin. His English tracts and sermons are of great theological interest, as expressing his denial of transubstantiation, his antipathy to Urban VI, and his general views on church abuses and their cure. These writings show a strong sincerity and an eager desire for the people's good; but their literary interest is chiefly historical, and they have little distinction of style.

Trevisa.

Of much interest, as showing the growing importance of the vernacular, are the English works translated from the Latin by John of Trevisa (?-1413). The first of these is a version of the well-known mediæval text-book or encyclopaedia, the *De Proprietatibus Rerum* of Bartholomæus Anglicus; but far more important is Trevisa's rendering of the Latin chronicle history, known as the *Polychronicon*, of Ranulph Higden. Higden was a Cheshire monk who is said to have died in 1364, and perhaps finished his chronicle some twelve years earlier. After the fashion of such surveys, it reviews the whole history of the world from the Creation downwards. By far its most interesting part is that which describes the social conditions of contemporary England; and when this was put into racy homely English for the benefit of Englishmen, a work of real note had been accomplished. Trevisa rendered his original freely, inaccurately, and with considerable expansion, and accompanied it with curt, and often curious, notes. His chronicle is interesting linguistically, and through its attempts to enlarge the scope of the English vocabulary; but it lacks the magical and strongly individual quality of style possessed by the third representative writer of the period, the author, or translator, of the so-called *Voyage and Travail of Sir John Mandeville*.

Mandeville's  
Voyages.

John Mandeville, knight, is unfortunately as wholly fictitious a personage as John Doe. According to the best opinion, he is the creation of an imaginative Frenchman, who wrote the description of his 'travels' at Liège some time before 1371. This writer may have been a certain Jean d'Outremeuse, who was certainly living and writing in that city in that year. In another volume, undoubtedly his own, Outremeuse says that Mandeville, after his travels, settled in Liège under the name of Jehan de Bourgogne, or Jean à la Barbe, and made certain disclosures to him on his death-bed. But Outremeuse's authorship of the *Voyage and Travail* is not proved beyond doubt; all that is certain is that the book was originally written in French, that it was translated into Latin and many European languages, and that it survives in English in three separate versions. Its main fabric is pieced together from various



authentic narratives of travel, including those of Albert of Aix, William of Boldenseele, and Odoric of Pordenone; but with this true romance the author has interwoven much wondrous romance of legend, and for this he has drawn on all manner of authorities, from the *Golden Legend* to Pliny and Herodotus. In his deft interweaving of these strands, and the wonderful authenticity with which he invests his wildest marvels, lies much of his book's compelling charm. During the early part of his narrative, in which he describes Turkey, Egypt, and the Holy Land, 'Mandeville' is comparatively chary of wonders, though even here occur the beautiful tale of how Roses first came, and the more famous, if less exquisite, one of the Watching of the Sparrow Hawk. But when he passes into less known lands, into Java and Thurse and Cathay, caution ceases to oppress him, and he multiplies his miracles at will. He tells us of the well, marvellously curative, 'that hath Odour and Savour of all Spices, and at every Hour of the Day changeth his Odour and his Savour diversely'. He describes 'the Diamonds of Ind, some of the greatness of a Bean, and some as great as an Hazel Nut, that grow together, Male and Female, be nourished with the Dew of Heaven, and engender commonly and bring forth small Children, that multiply and grow all the Year'. He had visited the Isle of Chana, 'where be Rats as great as Hounds: and men take them with great Mastiffs, for Cats may not take them'. He knew before his time that the earth was round, and told a wondrous tale of a man who 'sailed past Ind and the Isles beyond Ind, where be more than 5000 Isles', on and on, 'till he came to an Isle where he heard folk speak his own Language, calling on Oxen at the Plough, such Words as Men speak to Beasts in his own Country: whereof he had great Marvel, for he knew not how it might be'. The man had sailed round the world and had come to his own borders again, yet knew it not, and put back in fear and sadness over his vast course. But Mandeville's story and style reach their greatest moments in the description of the Great Chan of Cathay, and the beauty and wonder and cruelty of his court. Here his fancy takes on a colour, and his prose a richness, of sheer delight; and here, as throughout the whole narrative, we know our English writer to be no mere translator, but a great creative artist. His prose is simple, yet its cadence never wearies, and its effects are subtle and various. If we consider its period, it is a greater marvel than any of Cathay.



## CHAPTER IV

LYRIC AND MISCELLANEOUS POETRY OF THE  
MIDDLE ENGLISH PERIOD BEFORE CHAUCER

The Earliest English Lyric. As we have already seen, one of the distinctive marks of Middle English poetry was the triumph of the new metres, and nowhere is that triumph more complete than in the lyrics of the period. Yet their interest, unlike that of certain other kinds of contemporary poetry, is very far from being merely prosodic: it depends largely on their intrinsic beauty and charm. It has been claimed that the earliest English song in rhyme is the boat song—not as it has been sometimes strangely called, the ballad—of King Canut:

Merie sungen the muneches binnen Ely  
Tha Cnut king rew thereby:  
Roweth, knihtes, ner the land  
And here we these muneches sang.

Yet there are obstacles to this claim; and it should not be forgotten that the fragment occurs for the first time in a chronicle written a century and a half after the incident which it purports to record. More remarkable are the fragmentary hymns of the mariner turned hermit, St. Godric of Finchale, which exhibit rhyme and the new metre before 1170, the year of his death. Two rhymed fragments of verse, set for singing, survive from the latter half of the thirteenth century; and to the same period belongs the famous Cuckoo Song—‘Sumer is icumen in, lhude sing cuccu’—‘the earliest secular composition in parts which has hitherto been discovered—a Canon or Round for six voices’. This, apart from its historic interest, is admirably vigorous, and shows a fresh and most English delight in Nature.

Songs of  
Love and  
Religion.

To the very end of the thirteenth century belongs a collection of the first importance now known as the Harleian MS. 2253, consisting of poems said to have been written down at Leominster Abbey, in the south-west of England. This, and a few other collections of the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, supply us with our first notable body of English song. The greater number of the poems, and the earliest, are religious. Though Christian, they carry with them something of the gloom which is part of the older pagan faith, and is inseparable from Anglo-Saxon poetry. Life is a show, at once sorrowful and transitory, and the world is ‘but a brotil tree’:

Now shrinketh rose and lylie flour,  
That whilom bore that suete savour,  
In somer, that suete tyde:  
Ne is no quene so stark ne stoure,  
Ne no lady so bryht in bower,  
That deth ne shall by glyde.

In the beautiful *Love Rune* of Thomas de Hales, this warning is repeated—the warning that sounds again in Villon's most famous ballad and one of Shakespeare's most perfect songs, that 'golden girls and lads all must, like chimney-sweepers, come to dust':

Where is Paris and Heleyne,  
That weren so bright and fair of blee ?  
Amadas, Tristram and Dideyne,  
Yseude and such as she ?  
Ector with his sharp meyne,  
And Caesar rich of worldes fee ?  
They are y-glidden out of the reyne  
As the shaft is from the clec.

On the gloom of the present waits the gloom of the hereafter, lit only by the hope of salvation through Christ and his Mother. The lyrics in praise of Mary are among the most beautiful of all, and have something of the lover-like fervour which we meet later in Crashaw. This quality, like that which inspires the poems of earthly love, was doubtless due to the influence of the French *trouvères*, and it is significant that many poems in the famous Harleian 2253 are in French: yet it has been pointed out that the love poems of the period are by no means slavish renderings of the *amour courtois*, but that they have a freshness and sweetness which is English, and of the people. The most famous and charming of them is that in praise of Alison—

Betuene March and Averil,  
When spray beginneth to spring,  
The litel foul hath her will  
In her lud<sup>1</sup> to sing.  
I live in love-longing,  
For seemliest of alle thing,  
She may me bliss bring.  
I am in her baundoun,<sup>2</sup>  
An hendy hap I have yhent<sup>3</sup>  
I wot from heaven it is me sent,  
From all women my love is lent<sup>4</sup>  
And lit on Alison.

In certain of the poems love and nature are blended, as when a lover sings:

Blou, northerne wind,  
Send thou me my sweeting,  
Blou, northerne wind, blou, blou, blou !

Another poem puts the romance and joy of a season into a single lilting line:

Lenten is come with love to town.

<sup>1</sup> Speech.

<sup>2</sup> Power.

<sup>3</sup> I have had a stroke of luck.

<sup>4</sup> Turned.

A third utters an old fancy with fresh delight and grace:

I would I were a thrustle-cock,  
A bunting<sup>1</sup> or a laverock,<sup>2</sup>  
Sweet bride!  
Between her kirtle and her smock  
I would me hide.<sup>3</sup>

Political  
Songs.

Besides poems of love and religion, there were also many political songs of hate or scorn. One of the earliest of these is a poem written after the battle of Lewes (1264) and directed against Richard of Almain, brother of the reigning king:

Sir Simon de Montfort hath swore by his chin,  
Hadde he now here the Erl of Warin,  
Sholde he never come more to his inn  
With shelde, ne with spere, ne with other gin  
To helpe of Windesore!  
Richard! thah thou be ever trichard<sup>4</sup>  
Trichen shalt thou never more!

Minot.

Songs of this kind are frequent throughout the following hundred years. The most notable writer of them is Laurence Minot, whose period of activity covers the middle years of the fourteenth century. Minot's poems are chiefly in celebration of the English victories against the Scotch and the French. He taunts the former thus, after Halidon Hill:

Bot, loved be God, the pride is slaked  
Of them that war so stout on stede,  
And some of them is leved all naked  
Noght fer fro Berwik upon Twede.

His poem on the siege and taking of Calais begins thus:

Calays men, now may ye care,  
And mourning mun ye have to mede;  
Mirth on mold get ye no mare;  
Sir Edward shall ken you your creed.

Minot's poems are written in many metres, employing both rhyme and alliteration. They vary greatly in quality, but the best of them have vigour and point; and Minot's scorn for his country's foemen never degenerates into scolding.

Middle  
English  
Metres.

The general effect of Latin and French upon the new English prosody has been discussed earlier in this volume, and from this point of view, as from others, it is noteworthy that several of the religious songs in the collections we have mentioned are written in a blend of English with one or other of these languages. Rhyme has now become essential, and alliteration has ceased to be so. It is still freely used for ornament, but the full revival of it, to which we have made earlier refer-

<sup>1</sup> Blackbird

<sup>2</sup> Lark.

<sup>3</sup> The last four specimens are quoted in almost all the works dealing with the lyric of the period, but there are many other poems of hardly less charm. See *Early English Lyrics* (Chambers and Sidgwick) and Mr. E. K. Chambers's masterly terminal essay.

<sup>4</sup> Treacherous.



ence, is not as yet. Stanzas of varying length and complexity are used: one of the most important of these is the romance sestet, subsequently burlesqued by Chaucer in *Sir Thopas*. In some cases this is followed by a quatrain: in others the quatrain follows the romance octave. The famous six-line stanza of Burns is found, as so frequently in the Mystery cycles. And if the metres are French, they are already handled with somewhat of that licence which is later to become one of the most precious qualities of English poetry.

There fall also for consideration here a remarkable group of poems which, with *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, are preserved in a single manuscript, and were almost certainly all composed during the latter half of the fourteenth century.

*The Pearl*, *Cleanness*, and *Patience*, with *Gawain* itself, have been attributed to a single author, and in the case of the first three this attribution seems reasonable and almost certain. *Cleanness,*  
*Patience,*  
*The Pearl.*

The author's identity, however, remains undiscovered, despite the various attempts which have been made to prove that he is either 'Huchoun of the Awle Royale', or Ralph Strode, Fellow of Merton College, Oxford. It is established that in general his language is that of the extreme north-west midland.<sup>1</sup> All of the poems, including *Gawain*, use alliteration; but *Cleanness* and *Patience* are written in rhymeless quatrains of four beats,<sup>2</sup> whereas *Pearl* uses twelve-lined rhyming stanzas grouped in batches of five, and possessing each a recurrent terminal refrain. *Gawain* and its metre have been discussed elsewhere. *Cleanness* retells, with considerable force, certain stories of Scripture embodying the praise of purity. *Patience*, on the whole a better poem, paraphrases the Book of Jonah, and points a moral inculcating endurance and trust in the Divine Will. There is much spirit in the description of the tempest beneath which 'the windes on the wonne water so wrastel together'; and there is a quaint portrait of the 'wylde walterande whal' which swallows the prophet 'withouten touche of any tothe'. But by far the finest of the three poems is *Pearl*, in its first intention the lament of a bereaved father for his daughter, whose name, as the symbol of the pearl seems to indicate, may well have been Margaret. While he is searching in vain for his 'precious perle withouten spot' amid 'bloomes black and blue and red that schines full schir against the sun', his grief overcomes him and he falls into a swoon. He has a vision of his daughter, who reproves him for his sorrow, since what he lost was 'but a rose that flowered and failed as kind (nature) it gave'—a rose which is now become a pearl of price. He tells her that through her death he is become a 'joyless jeweller', but would be a joyful one could he cross the water that separates her from him.

<sup>1</sup> Charles Osgood, Introduction to his edition of *The Pearl* (Belles Lettres Series, D. C. Heath & Co., Boston).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. I. Gollancz, Preface to his edition of *Patience* (Clarendon Press).

She comforts him with parables, and with the assurance of her bliss. He has a vision of the heavenly city 'of great renown', glorious with all manner of jewels; and after a vain attempt to join her, he awakes.

Attempts have been made to show that this poem is a mere allegory embodying no personal grief; but few who have read it closely and with sympathy will adopt this view. Nor is it very profitable to scan this pearl of poems too closely, as some have scanned it, for flaws of structure and phrasing. After pedantry has wrought its worst upon it it remains a thing of high beauty and spiritual worth; and the unknown who made it and its fellows is certainly one of the great poets of his age. Our next chapter leads us to a greater still.

## CHAPTER V

### CHAUCER, LANGLAND, GOWER

The New  
Prosody.

IN Geoffrey Chaucer (1340?-1400), 'the morning star of song', we reach the most consummate expression of mediaeval thought and art in English poetry, together with our first great earnest of the Renaissance. The language in which he wrote—the London variety of the east midland dialect—had been gradually simplified through more than two centuries, and was slowly moving toward its modern form: little by little, the elaborate Old English inflections had been levelled under a few common forms, and were now well on their way to disappearance. A relic of the old speech and syntax survived in the syllabic value given, in most cases, to the final -e; and this matter becomes very important in relation to Chaucer, since failure to understand its prosodic significance led to the belief, entertained for many generations, that the form of his verse was crude and broken. As we have seen, the old alliterative metre which had been the staple of Anglo-Saxon poetry had been temporarily revived at this period, notably in the later romances. We shall deal later in this chapter with its handling by Langland: Chaucer, however, partly through training and environment, partly from a sure poetic instinct, rejected this form in favour of measures which disregarded alliteration and ensued rhyme and a comparatively strict accentual regularity. He took over certain of the rhyming metres which had become acclimatized in England—notably the octosyllabic rhyming couplet: his use of certain others was to a large extent affected by contemporary French practice. It has been noticed that, despite his great general debt to Italian writers, he borrows the form of Italian verse only in one brief passage<sup>1</sup>—doubtless because the measures which he had independently perfected gave him full satisfaction.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. W. P. Ker, *English Mediaeval Literature*, p. 227.



His earlier writings were strongly influenced by the poetry of mediæval France: in his intermediate work, produced after his journeys to the south of Europe, Italian influence was strong, and the change is one not only of country, but of period and spirit; for the Italian writer to whom he owes most, Giovanni Boccaccio, was a pioneer of the Renaissance and the new humanism. In Chaucer's latest and most famous work, the *Canterbury Tales*, he writes with greater force and originality than heretofore. For these reasons, some have attempted to divide his work sharply into three periods, French, Italian, and English; but such a division is misleading, for the French spirit is strong in him from beginning to end, and in his last work French and Italian influences blend. On the other hand it is dangerous to confine the term 'English' to his later work, or to imply that strong originality is lacking in his earlier; for even in *The Book of the Duchess* his handling is native and individual, and his *Troilus and Criseyde*, for all its debt to Boccaccio, is a great original work in its own right. Nor is that explanation of him sufficient which says that 'his mind was French, like his name', and that he was 'a direct descendant of the French trouvères'<sup>1</sup>; for the 'God's plenty' which Dryden found in the *Prologue to the Canterbury Tales* is the earliest great harvesting of the English spirit.

The earlier editions of Chaucer, and notably that of Thomas Thynne (1532), attributed to him several works now unanimously regarded as non-Chaucerian, and a few others which are rejected by most, though not by all, modern scholars. Modern Chaucerian scholarship dates from the great edition of the *Canterbury Tales* of Thomas Tyrwhitt (1775) and the determination of the Chaucerian canon has been carried on by a succession of scholars, English and American, of whom the chief are Skeat and Furnivall. For the time being we may confine ourselves to that canon, postponing discussion of the Chaucer apocrypha.

Much doubt exists as to the dates and order<sup>2</sup> of Chaucer's chief works. It is practically certain, however, that among the very earliest comes his translation of the *Romaunt of the Rose*. The first part of this very famous work was written by the French poet, Guillaume de Lorris, probably between the years 1225 and 1230. The second part, written somewhere between 1268 and 1277, is by Jean de Meung. The two parts differ widely in spirit; for Guillaume wrote in a vein of idealism and romance, whereas Jean has treated the manifold subjects of his choice, and especially women and contemporary society, realistically and with mordant satire. The *Romaunt*, as originally conceived by Guillaume, is an allegory of love: in one sense it is an epitome of preceding French romantic poetry; and it became a potent influence upon succeeding

<sup>1</sup> Emile Legouis, *Chaucer*, p. 57.

<sup>2</sup> For a careful discussion of this matter see *The Poetry of Chaucer*, by R. K. Root.



poetry, French and English. It is certain that Chaucer translated some part of it<sup>1</sup>; but opinions have differed as to whether the translation which he made is the one we now possess. Some<sup>2</sup> regard the version as entirely his, others<sup>3</sup> deny that he had any part in it: the best opinion would seem to be that its first and last parts are Chaucerian, but that the intermediate part (Fragment B) is by another hand. The whole version covers a third part only of the original work. Like the original, it is written in the octosyllabic couplet, which Chaucer handles even thus early with workmanlike power. In choosing this famous allegory for his subject, he puts himself in touch with the romantic tradition of France, and at the same time gives an earnest of his own later use of allegory. The satirical habit of Jean de Meung evoked the satire latent in his own nature, and Meung is thus in some sense responsible for the ironical attitude constantly evident in Chaucer's later work.

Early  
Minor  
Poems.

Within the same early period also fall several of Chaucer's minor poems, in which the French influence still predominates. These include ballades, roundels, and virelays, many of which are now lost. *Chaucer's A.B.C.* is translated from the French of Guillaume de Deguileville. *The Complaint of Pity*<sup>4</sup> is written in the French manner, and may have had a French original: its main importance lies in the probability that it introduced into English for the first time the great seven-lined stanza known as *rime royal*. Here the stanza is employed lyrically after the prevalent French fashion: later, Chaucer was to make the discovery that it could be used for narrative purposes, and was to put that discovery to consummate use.

*The Book  
of the  
Duchess.*

*The Book of the Duchess* was probably written toward the end of 1369, shortly after the death of Blanche, Duchess of Lancaster, which it commemorates. Its allegorical setting and its atmosphere, at once courtly and romantic, have obvious French analogues. It is gracefully written, but lacks the gusto and irony which make their appearance in *The Parliament of Fowls*, and are henceforth seldom far to seek in Chaucer. The *Parliament* is an allegorical poem in which a 'formel' or female eagle is wooed and won by a male eagle of royal birth, after she has rejected two lesser suitors. There is almost certainly a reference here to the betrothal of Richard II to

<sup>1</sup> See his reference to such a translation in the *Prologue* to the *Legend of Good Women*, pp. 328-31.

<sup>2</sup> e. g. Professor Lounsbury, *Studies in Chaucer*.

<sup>3</sup> e. g. Professor Skeat, *Essays on Chaucer* (collected by the Chaucer Society).

<sup>4</sup> The following are the chief of Chaucer's remaining shorter poems: *The Complaint of Mars*, *A Complaint to his Lady*, *The Former Age*, *A Ballad of Good Counsel*, the *Envois* to Scogan and to Bukton, *Lack of Steadfastness*, and the *Complaint to his Empty Purse*. For an account of these, and of his translation of Boethius (*De Consolatione*) and his *Treatise on the Astrolabe*, see R. K. Root, *The Poetry of Chaucer*.

Anne of Bohemia in 1382. The poem contains much that is courtly and charming, but for many its chief appeal lies in the amusing views on love put forward by a company of birds ranging from the materialistic goose to the sentimental turtle-dove. Various literary 'sources' have been found for this poem, but its finest work is undoubtedly Chaucer's own. Like the fragmentary and interesting romance, *Anelida and Arcite*, which perhaps follows it in time, it is written in rime royal.

In 1373, and again in 1378, Chaucer visited Italy, and his visits quickened, if they did not kindle, the love of Italian literature which so profoundly affected his subsequent work and outlook. The first-born of that love is *Troilus and Criseyde*, in which he retells with a new and mightier mastery the romantic story which had been gradually built up throughout the Middle Ages, reaching Chaucer through the *Filostrato* of Giovanni Boccaccio. The three chief characters of the Italian poem, Troilus the Trojan prince and lover, his false love Cressida, and the friendly and unscrupulous go-between Pandarus, become new creations beneath Chaucer's transforming hand. The delicate and fickle nature of Criseyde is subtly and surely limned, onward from the hour when Troilus first sees her in the temple, to the last stage after she has departed from Troy with her new love, Diomedes. Modern taste may find less interest in the rhapsodies of Troilus, yet he too is greatly drawn. Pandarus, who in Boccaccio is a youthful and dissolute gallant, has in Chaucer become an elderly patron of sin, drawn with the finest comic insight. Chaucer has now reached his full strength in the use of rime royal, and *Troilus*, apart from its greatness as a narrative, contains some of his finest poetry. He here comes very near to the modern spirit, not only through his humour but through his keen realistic sense of character, and especially of feminine character. Despite its length and its digressions, the poem is a masterpiece of sustained power.

*Troilus  
and Criseyde.*

In *The House of Fame* Chaucer reverts to the octosyllable, and to allegory. Suggestions for the story were found in Dante, Virgil, and Ovid. The poet, after visiting the temple of Venus, is transported by an eagle, figuring Philosophy, to the House of Fame, where he has a vision of those whom the capricious goddess has favoured. In one sense the poem may be considered a satire on the fickleness of fortune; but it is satire interwoven with a playfulness delightfully evident in the drawing of the sardonic and disputatious eagle. *The Legend of Good Women* (probably written during the years 1385-1386) is preceded by an allegorical Prologue, extant in two widely differing versions, in which Chaucer is shown worshipping his favourite flower, the daisy,<sup>1</sup> on a fair morning

*The  
House of  
Fame.*

*The Legend  
of  
Good  
Women.*

<sup>1</sup> Professor J. L. Lowes has shown (in the *Publications of the Modern Language Association*, Vol. xix, No. 4), that Chaucer's description of the daisy and its symbolism owes much to the writings of the French



of May. The God of Love, attended by nineteen beautiful women, appears to him, and upbraids him with having written poems in disparagement of love and lovers. The poet tries to justify himself, but is ordered by Queen Alcestis to reform and to write a 'glorious legend of good women', lauding their virtues and castigating the men who had betrayed them. He thereupon prepares to write the legends of the women whom he sees before him. Here ends the Prologue, which is one of the most charming things in Chaucer, by virtue of its poetry, its delicate self-portraiture, and its radiant picture of springtide. Of the legends themselves, Chaucer only completed eight, leaving a ninth unfinished. Though the best of them are exquisite, he had clearly wearied of his task some time before he relinquished it. Doubtless he felt that still greater work awaited him. The *Legend* is remarkable for the employment of the great ten-syllabled rhyming couplet later known as the heroic couplet or 'riding-rhyme'. This had already been used in France, and was not utterly unknown in England; but it certainly did not become a staple English measure until Chaucer touched it with his sovereign hand.<sup>1</sup>

*The Can-  
terbury  
Tales.*

In *The Canterbury Tales* Chaucer at last reached his full strength.<sup>2</sup> Collections of stories connected by a common theme or framework had been frequent in the East, and already existed in Europe, where they had reached a notable development in the *Decameron* of Boccaccio. The *Decameron* may possibly have been known to Chaucer: he cannot have known Gower's story-sequence, the *Confessio Amantis*, which according to the best estimate was not published till 1390. In any case, Chaucer's great collection is a thing apart. The conception of a pilgrimage from London to Canterbury enabled him to assemble quite plausibly a number of personages drawn from all social ranks, embodying all manner of experi-

poet, Guillaume de Machaut, and of Machaut's disciples, Froissart and Eustache Deschamps. The cult of the marguerite was common in French poetry, yet Chaucer here, as elsewhere, handled his borrowings less as imitator than as conqueror, and made of them a new thing of beauty. The general scheme of the legend may have been suggested by the *Heroides* of Ovid, and the *De Claris Mulieribus* of Boccaccio. The matter of the different *Tales* came to him through a variety of sources, classical and contemporary.

<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of the early history of the heroic couplet, and of the part played by Chaucer in perfecting it and the other metres of his choice, see G. Saintsbury's *History of English Prosody*, Book II, Chap. IV; also his chapter on Chaucer in the *Cambridge History of English Literature*, vol. ii, p. 176.

<sup>2</sup> The collection in its present form was probably conceived and begun in 1387 and was continued till Chaucer's death. *The Knight's Tale*, *The Second Nun's Tale*, and probably several of the rest, had been written considerably before this date, and were subsequently incorporated in the main work.



ence, and rendered communicative through the freemasonry of the road. The gamut of the characters runs from that great gentleman, the Knight, through the hale and prosperous Franklin, the crafty Man of Law, and the poor Oxford Scholar, down to the swindling Pardoner, the bawdy-minded Miller and Reeve, and the drunken Cook. Among the most memorable pilgrims are two women—the Prioress, sweet, sentimental, and modern as a character of Meredith's, and the Wife of Bath, coarse, forcible, subtle and various, a worthy mate for Falstaff himself. The travellers, to the number of twenty-nine, are marshalled at the Tabard Inn in Southwark, whence they set forth on their journey, conducted by the self-sufficient Host. They agree to beguile the way by telling stories in rotation. These form the staple of the poem; but they would utterly lose their savour were they regarded apart from their setting, and as isolated wholes. The full significance of each tale can only be rightly understood if it is considered in relation to its teller and its motley-minded audience. Professor Saintsbury, indeed, considers it hardly fantastic to say that the whole Prologue ought to be read, or vividly remembered, before the reading of each tale.

The stories are infinitely various in character and origin. *The Knight's Tale*, as befits its teller, is a romance of war and love. It retells, with strong individual power, the story of Palamon, Arcite, and Emilia, which Chaucer had found in the *Teseide* of Boccaccio. To the same order belongs the tale of the Man of Law, which narrates the tragic suffering of the guiltless Constance, familiar to Chaucer through the Anglo-Norman chronicle of Nicholas Trivet. One of the most sad and beautiful stories of the collection is that in which the Prioress retells, with a changed setting, the well-known legend describing the murder by Jews of the child martyr, Hugh of Lincoln. At the opposite pole stand the tales of the Miller and the Reeve, coarse and racy after the fashion of the French *fabliau* on which they are patterned. Certain of the stories, such as the 'moral tale vertuous' of Melibeus, and the Parson's tale, are really homilies—and tedious homilies—in disguise, which the audience seems to have accepted without wincing or suffering. More to their taste, doubtless, was the rich comedy of the Nun's Priest's tale, describing the humours of Chantecleer, his hen Dame Partlet, and the marauding fox, Dan Russell. In one of the tales, *The Rhyme of Sir Thopas*, Chaucer makes friendly fun of the old romances such as *Sir Eglamour*, and of a famous romance metre. The remaining tales are of various kinds and origin, and the collection is a huge epitome of mediaeval life, learning, and legend.

Apart from Chaucer's narrative power, his emotional range, here and elsewhere, is wide and various. His habitual humour and irony keep his outlook on life sane and free of sentimentalism; yet he has a sure hold on tragic issues, and the statement that he lacks 'high seriousness' must be regarded as

Chaucer's  
Mind and  
Art.

one of the vagaries of a great critic. When he wishes he can tell with mastery 'a lamentable tale of things done long ago, and ill done'; and his longer works apart, a fine philosophy or faith is surely evident in his *Ballad of Good Counsel*, with its opening line,

Flee fro the prees and dwelle with sothfastnesse,  
and its refrain,

And trouthe shall delivere, hit is no drede.

He does not write in the missionary spirit of his contemporary Langland, yet no one who reads his prose translation of Boethius, or the confessional conclusion of his *Parson's Tale*, can regard him as lacking in ethical fervour. The outstanding quality of his nature is his strong humanism, his intense interest in all human life and knowledge. The impulse which made him write his treatise on the Astrolabe, and discourse eruditely on alchemy through the mouth of the Canon's Yeoman, dictated also that vast criticism of mediaeval life, the *Canterbury Tales*. Despite the grievous misunderstanding of him which prevailed throughout a long period of our literature, hardly any poet in any country has had more fervent homage from the poets of his own and succeeding ages. A charming picture of him is that drawn by Swinburne:

Along these low pleached lanes, on such a day,  
So soft a day as this, through shade and sun,  
With glad grave eyes that scanned the glad wild way,  
And heart still hovering o'er a song begun,  
And smile that warmed the world with benison,  
Our father, lord long since of lordly rhyme,  
Long since hath haply ridden, when the lime  
Bloomed broad above him, flowering where he came.  
Because thy passage once made warm this clime,  
Our father Chaucer, here we praise thy name.

The  
Chaucer  
Apocry-  
pha.

As has been already stated, the early editions of Chaucer attributed to him many pieces now known to be non-Chaucerian. *The Tale of Gamelyn* has been discussed in a previous chapter. Its metre and general style are decisively against Chaucer's having written it, but there is plausibility in Professor Skeat's suggestion that he kept it by him with the intention of working it up into one of the *Canterbury Tales*. Some of the poems can be assigned with certainty to other contemporary authors: thus the *Testament of Cresseid* is by Henryson, the *Complaint of the Black Knight* and the *Flower of Courtesy* by Lydgate, *The Letter of Cupid* by Occleve, *The Praise of Peace* by Gower, *The Cuckoo and the Nightingale* by Clanvowe, and *La Belle Dame sans Merci* by Sir Richard Ros. The authorship of other pieces remains uncertain, but is proved to be non-Chaucerian by specific considerations of style and metre, and especially by a noticeable uncertainty, of which Chaucer was never guilty, in the use of the final -e. To this class belong *The Pardoner and the Tapster*, *The Second Mer-*



*chant's Tale*, and *The Plowman's Tale*. The first of these is admirably racy and amusing; the last has the most poetry.

Among the best of the apocryphal poems, and, indeed, of all the non-Chaucerian poems of the period, is *The Flower and the Leaf*, a charmingly written allegory in rime royal, describing the richly dight and chapleted retinues of Diana and Flora, who symbolize respectively the life of honour and the life of loveliness and love. *The Assembly of Ladies* is in the same metre, and describes the court and cult of the Lady Loyalty. The piece as a whole is inferior to *The Flower and the Leaf*, but contains some pleasing descriptions, including that of the Lady herself:

Aboute her nekke a sort of fair rubyes  
 In whyte floures of right fyne enamayl;  
 Upon her heed, set in the freshest wyse,  
 A cercle with great balays of entayl;  
 That in earnest to speke, withouten fayl,  
 For yonge and olde, and every maner age  
 It was a world to loke on her visage.

*The Court of Love* is evidently written by a skilled craftsman, for its rime royal moves with the greatest freedom and grace. It describes the homage paid to the Lady Rosiall, in obedience to the ritual of the Court, by her 'servant' Philogenet, a 'clerk' of Cambridge, who sets forth on his adventure thus promisingly:

When I was yong, at eighteen year of age,  
 Lusty and light, desirous of plesaunce,  
 Approaching on full sad and ripe corage,  
 Love arted me to do myn observaunce  
 To his estate.

The statutes of the Court are described in detail, not without wholesome touches of satire. The beautiful conclusion, in which the birds descant upon the theme of love, begins thus:

On May day, when the lark began to sing,  
 To matens went the lusty nightingale  
 Within a temple shapen hawthorn-wise.

*The Court of Love* must certainly be assigned to a much later period than that of Chaucer.

In sharp contrast to Chaucer's greatest work stands the only Langland poem by a contemporary which even begins to rival it in power — *The Vision of Piers the Plowman*. This poem is composed in the revived alliterative metre which has already been discussed in relation to the mediaeval romances. It exists to-day in three texts, commonly distinguished as A, B, and C, which represent successive and widely differing drafts of the poem. Most have hitherto accepted the tradition that these are all the work of a certain William Langland, or Langley, a native of either Shropshire or Oxfordshire, who probably wrote the A draft as early as 1362, and made the first revision somewhere about 1377 and the second in 1393. An attempt



has recently been made to show that Langland had little or no part in the poem, and that its three drafts represent the successive labours of four anonymous authors, and of a fifth called John But. It is claimed that the A text is the work of three of these men, and that B and C represent revisions and additions made respectively by the two remaining ones. In the opinion of excellent judges, however, the case for the quintuple authorship has not been satisfactorily made out; and although on the other hand the authorship of Langland has not been conclusively established, there is fair evidence in support of it, and it may be provisionally accepted until refuted by conclusive argument. Questions of authorship apart, much complication arises from the notable differences between the three versions, which make it very difficult to present a brief survey of the poem as a whole. The B text is nearly three times as long as the A text; it makes numerous insertions among the visions of which that version consists, and adds lengthy visions of its own. The C text is of nearly the same length as the B text, and there are far fewer differences between these two than there are between A and the corresponding part of B. No attempt can be made here to describe these differences in detail, or to supply more than the most general outline of the allegory, as it may be pieced together from the three texts.

The sleeper is shown a series of visions portraying the world with its wickedness, folly, and greed, and showing also certain forces which urge humanity toward a purer and truer life. Prominent in the first vision of the A text is the picture of Lady Meed, who embodies the desire of worldly gain. Meed is betrothed to False (Falsehood): Favel (Duplicity) prepares to give away the bride, in the presence of a vast company. The bridal party ride to London, attended by Simony and Civil (Civil Law). The king, however, has Meed apprehended. False flies, and Conscience, when asked if he will marry the Lady, refuses with scorn, and is supported both by Reason and by Love. Throughout runs the suggestion that Meed, had she wished, might have done much good instead of much harm, and might still do so. The second vision recaptures the opening scene of the first, showing Conscience preaching to a field of folk, symbolizing the world. There follow the confessions of the Seven Deadly Sins, of which the most interesting is that of Gluttony, with its vivid picture of a carouse in a contemporary ale-house. The company determine to seek Truth, and call on Piers the Plowman to be their guide. He says he will lead them on their way when he has ploughed his field: meanwhile, he rebukes the 'wasters' and shows by his toil and virtue the way of right-living. The dream concludes the vision with a brief exhortation to all men to seek Do-Well. In the third vision the search is pursued, and to Do-Well are added Do-bet (Do-better) and Do-best. There follows a very complicated allegory symbol-

izing the relation of these virtues to Anima (Life), Inwit (Discretion), Wit, and Study. Various definitions of the three are offered by various characters: according to the most natural one, Do-well is Love, and Do-bet and Do-best are Secular and Ecclesiastical Benevolence. But at the end Clergy brings the seeker no certainty that his quest will be crowned with discovery.

Much new narrative and complication are introduced by the additional visions of the B and C texts. The search for the three is pursued and *Activa-Vita*, or *Honest Toil*, takes part in it, bearing upon his coat the stains of his commerce with life. Piers also reappears, and now is seemingly identified with Christ. Then follows a description of the Crucifixion, and a splendid passage is devoted to the Harrowing of Hell, and the triumphant release of the saved souls. But the poem lapses into gloom, and ends in preparation for the last great fight with Anti-Christ.

Despite the complexity of *Piers the Plowman*, there is little of that incongruity between the different visions and versions which is postulated by the separatist theory. They possess a general unity of atmosphere and outlook which seems inconsistent with the suggestion of multiple authorship. The poem is at once an allegory, a satire, and a sermon. The author is intensely preoccupied with the social problems of his day, and with the vaster problem of good and evil. To him, a reformation of life seems essential, and that reformation must be primarily spiritual. His fervid insistence on this new order is emphasized by his vivid pictures of the unleavened world which he sees before him. In his portrayal of mediaeval society, he is a satiric realist; but he is also constantly a poet, and can both see and create beauty. His message of reformation must not be confused with certain modern theories of social regeneration: his cure for evil, as he sees it in the state, lies not in socialism but in the performance by each class of its fitting function. His longing for reform is suffused with mysticism, and he is ever insistent on the mystic virtue of humility. His intensity of faith and purpose, and his sombre intuition of worldly life, make his work a necessary complement to Chaucer's benign and comprehensive reading of the Middle Age.

To the author of *Piers the Plowman* has been also attributed *Richard the Redeless*,<sup>1</sup> a fragmentary poem dealing with the misgovernment of Richard II. Although it has much in common with *Piers*, in form and spirit, a common authorship has not been decisively established, and there are many arguments against it. The resemblances are probably due to imitation by an admirer of the longer poem. That it had many admirers and imitators is proved by the existence of a number of other poems closely resembling it in form or spirit. Chief among these are *The Parliament of the Three Ages*,

<sup>1</sup> To adopt the title given to it by its most important editor, Skeat.



*Winner and Waster*, *The Plowman's Creed*, and *The Plowman's Tale*.<sup>1</sup> Considerable as was the influence of *Piers the Plowman* on succeeding poetry, it was not comparable to that of Chaucer, nor even to that of Gower. Both of these had the advantage of Langland in adopting the metres which were destined to prevail; and Chaucer, at least, had the further advantage of an infinitely more free, genial, and universal method of narrative.

Gower.

At a first glance John Gower (1325 ?–1408) may seem to have a good deal in common with the author of *Piers the Plowman*; for the first of his three long poems, *Speculum Meditantis* (*Mirour de l'Homme*), is a moral allegory dealing with the battle of the Virtues and Vices for the soul of man; and the second, *Vox Clamantis* (1382 ?) surveys and arraigns the social and political conditions of its day. The *Mirour*, however, is written in French, and based on French models, and it has little of Langland's originality and intensity. It lacks, moreover, the vivid descriptions which save *Piers the Plowman* alike from the slough of didacticism and from the heavy-headed revel of abstract allegory. The *Vox Clamantis*, again, is written in Latin, and further differs from *Piers the Plowman* in that it bases its indictment of society on a historical occurrence, the Peasants' Rising of 1381. For ourselves, who are concerned with English literature, the interest of these two poems is only secondary; but it is significant of the unfixed condition of the vernacular that Gower should have chosen to write them in foreign tongues: and it is characteristic, too, both of him and of his time, that one of those tongues should have been French. Chaucer, while accepting the French spirit, was able to transcend it by dint of his own natural genius, and through his acceptance of the newer Italian humanism; but Gower remained French to the end. It has been truly said<sup>2</sup> of him that 'he invented nothing in style or matter', and that 'the merit of his style is that it accomplishes in English what had been attained long before, and practised for many generations in France'. The French influence, indeed, affected not only the general style and spirit of his English poetry, but the details of its metrical form.

*Confessio  
Amantis.*

The poem of his which chiefly concerns us here, the *Confessio Amantis*, was composed, in English, between the years 1386 and 1390. It consists of about 33,000 lines, and is written in the octosyllabic rhyming couplet which Gower handles after the French model, and far more rigidly than Chaucer. It has been shown in a previous chapter that the conception of a story-sequence held together by a common framework is of Eastern origin, and was early familiarized in Europe in a series of legends and romances. With the chief of these

<sup>1</sup> As has been shown elsewhere, this last poem has also been attributed to Chaucer.

<sup>2</sup> W. P. Ker, *Gower (Essays on Mediaeval Literature)*.



Gower was certainly familiar. He obviously owes much to Chaucer and to *The Romaunt of the Rose*. From the *Romaunt* he borrowed his conception of the Genius who in that poem had been the priest of Nature, but who in the *Confessio* becomes the priest of Venus and the poet's confessor and mentor in relation to his transgressions against Love. These the Genius discusses in relation to the Seven Deadly Sins, and their progeny of minor offences. In every case he improves the occasion and tells a tale, or tales, which emphasize the nature of the sin. These tales, which number more than a hundred, are the main matter of the *Confessio*. They are adapted from various writers, classical and mediaeval. Many of the best, including the admirably told tale of Ceyx and Aleyone, come from Ovid. The tale of Jason and Medea, another of Gower's masterpieces, is taken from the *Roman de Troie* of Benoît de Sainte-More. Others are filched from the dull page of Guido delle Colonne and retold with a difference. These and his numerous other 'originals' supply Gower with a throng of characters whose love stories belong to the history or romance of all times and countries. Chief among his men and women, beside the four first mentioned, are Perseus and Andromeda, Hercules and Deianira, Alboin and Rosmunda, Actaeon, Ulysses, Rosiphelee, and Mundus and Paulina. Gower, as he tells us in the prologue to the poem, wished here to depart in some measure from his earlier didacticism and to minister to his reader's delight. He was helped to do this by his admirable gift of story-telling, and by the poetry that was frequently in him. His best tales are vivid and dramatic, and if he does not invent, he can on occasion embellish charmingly. On the other hand he has neither the power, the scope, nor the humour of Chaucer, and the monotony of his couplet is too often unrelieved by any grace or passion of style. He is often distressingly long-winded both in his main narratives and in the digressions with which they are laden. Despite the professions of his prologue, he cannot for long escape the didactic habit of his age.

Yet in the better parts of the *Confessio* he shows himself to be a true craftsman, writing with ease, grace, and correctness. The worth of his work is in large measure relative: it cannot be fully understood till it is contrasted with the crude and tentative striving evident in the English poetry of the past and of his own day, and indeed of the immediate future. His historical value is great, and he helped English poetry toward a correcter sense of form and a surer mastery of narrative. His example was lost on many of his immediate successors, as their work shows: yet from his own day onward he was highly honoured, and for many generations was even ranked with Chaucer. To our own age such a coupling seems fantastic: yet a reading of the Fourth Book of the *Confessio* will convince any sensitive mind that the value of Gower's best work is more than merely historical. His remaining works

include his *Cinkante Ballades*, written in French, and dealing gracefully, if conventionally, with themes of love; and his Latin *Cronica Tripertita*, in leonine hexameters, which describes with angry Lancastrian bias the last twelve years of the reign of Richard II.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE AFTERMATH OF CHAUCER IN ENGLAND

Lydgate, Occleve—Minor Chaucerians—Hawes.

Prosodic  
Changes.

A POET of Chaucer's greatness, writing in an age when there was little other great poetry, was bound to have a host of imitators; and for peculiar reasons his influence was by no means solely for good. For the most part, they took the more conventional portion of his work for their model; and few of them followed the lead he had given them in *Troilus and Criseyde* or the Prologue to the *Canterbury Tales*. As has been shown, he had adopted a very exact scheme of metrical scansion which corresponded closely to the pronunciation and syntax of his day. During the following years, the inflexional changes of the language, and especially the change in the use and pronunciation of the final -e, demanded a corresponding prosodic modification; and it is the failure of his successors to realize this fact, and their attempt to use his prosody without understanding its secrets, that makes much of their verse halting and even hopeless.

Mainly to Chaucer, but in some measure to Gower, must be traced the continuance by following poets of the allegorical tradition of the *Romaunt of the Rose*, and of the habit of epical story-telling which accompanied that tradition and in some sense competed with it. Yet little blame can attach to either of these two for the poetical excesses—they clearly cannot be called shortcomings—of their most prolific follower, John Lydgate (1370 ?–1450 ?). Lydgate did not share Edgar Allan Poe's antipathy to the long poem. His own three longest poems number between them eighty-eight thousand lines, and the whole of his extant works reach a total of between one hundred and thirty and one hundred and forty thousand. Longest of all is *The Falls of Princes* (numbering more than thirty-six thousand lines), which is based on Boccaccio's *De Casibus Illustrum Virorum*, and is the prototype of the Tudor *Mirror for Magistrates*. Its substance is accurately described by its title: it is probably the most tedious of all Lydgate's poems, and to say this is to say much. Very long also are his *Pilgrimage of Man* and his *Troy Book*, which are respectively free and wordy renderings of Deguileville's metrical *Pèlerinage de la Vie Humaine* and of Guido delle Colonne's prose *Historia Destructionis Troiae*. In the

Lydgate.



*Pilgrimage* the allegorical motive prevails; in the *Troy Book*, the epical. Though the *Troy Book* has certain passages of interest, each poem, taken as a whole, might well have made 'Guatimozin doze on his red gridiron of brass'. Some, with small justification, have thought that Bunyan was seriously indebted to the *Pilgrimage* for *The Pilgrim's Progress*. *The Story of Thebes* is a mistaken attempt, running to nearly five thousand lines, to continue the sequence of the *Canterbury Tales*. *The Temple of Glass* is a long and dull love-poem interspersed with allegory. Somewhat more readable is the unfinished *Reason and Sensuality*, an adaptation of the early French love romance, *Les Échecs amoureux*. Chief among Lydgate's remaining longer poems are *The Life of our Lady*, *Guy of Warwick*, and his various *Legends of Saints*. For narrative his favourite metres are the octosyllabic and heroic couplets. His shorter poems, of which there are many, are written mainly in rime royal and the ballade stanza. Throughout these, and throughout his *Life of Our Lady*, occur occasional passages of true beauty which, to some extent, relieve the general tedium of his verse.

Lydgate was given equal place with Chaucer and Gower by many of his contemporaries and immediate successors, and in modern times he has had such 'powers that will work for him' as Gray, Coleridge, and Mrs. Browning; but it is doubtful whether any of the powers in question had read him hard and long. Most who have done so have probably felt their enthusiasm sicken and fall away. Lydgate himself thought poorly of his gift of versification, for he writes:

- And trouthe of metre I set also a-syde,  
For of that art I had as tho no guide  
Me to reduce when I went a-wronge.  
I took none hede neither of short nor long.

He has been taken at his own valuation by most moderns who 'speak the tongue that Shakespeare spake'. Others not so handicapped have come to know him better than he knew himself, and have been able to wring harmony and pleasure out of his discords.<sup>1</sup> It has been claimed on his behalf that his printers are in some sense responsible for the lapses in his text, and that there is method in what looks like his prosodic madness. This last claim, even if substantiated, would bring little consolation to a reader with a sensitive ear, who might well reply that a century and a half later there was also method in the discordant lunacies of Abraham Fraunce. Most discriminating readers will probably agree that Lydgate is 'prosodically incompetent'<sup>2</sup> even if they do not dismiss his

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Schipper, *Englische Metrik*; Schick, *Temple of Glass*, Introduction.

<sup>2</sup> George Saintsbury, 'The English Chaucerians', *Cambridge History of English Literature*, vol. ii, p. 205.



verse as a 'barbarous jangle'.<sup>1</sup> Those who find it 'smooth'<sup>2</sup> are to be congratulated on an ear that would presumably withstand the discord of the crack of doom.

In his *Testament*, and again in his lively *London Lickpenny*,<sup>3</sup> Lydgate has given a good deal of information regarding his own life and the manners of his time.

Oocleve.

This confessional and descriptive habit is shared by the poet with whom he is constantly coupled, Thomas Oocleve (1368 ?–1450 ?). In his early poem *La Male Règle*, and in his later *Complaint* and *Dialogue* (1421), Oocleve discourses of his own life and habits with something of Pepys's frank garrulity, though with little of his gusto and genius. Despite their manifold shortcomings, these works contain some pleasing human touches; thus, in the *Règle*, he describes his cowardice, and states that he was in the habit of taking boat at Westminster out of vanity, because the watermen called him 'Mister'. In the later poems he relates, with considerable pathos, how when he had emerged from a period of insanity, he found his friends avoiding him and predicting, within his hearing, a return of his malady. Further news of his life is made known to us through a dialogue between himself and a beggar in his *De Regimine Principum*, a poem of about five thousand five hundred lines, written for the instruction and edification of Prince Hal. On the purely conventional pretext that his *Epistle to Cupid* had given offence to women, he writes in their honour a poetical tale, *Jereslaus' Wife*, the substance of which he had found in the *Gesta Romanorum*. From the same source he culled a further story, *Jonathas*, and this, together with his fine *Ars Sciendi Mori*, his verse letter to Sir John Oldcastle, and several shorter poems, complete the tale of his work.

Both Oocleve's versification and his capacity for narrative are surer than Lydgate's, but such virtue is only relative, and we constantly find him caught in the metrical snares of the period. Even apart from this shortcoming, he must be reckoned rather a determined versifier than a true poet. Historic considerations apart, his verse is chiefly interesting for what it tells us about his life: in itself it is generally flaccid and lacks the sinews of song.

Minor  
Chau-  
cerians.

Later in the history of English poetry the influence of Chaucer was to take hold on many men far greater than Lydgate and Oocleve: during their own period it affected many lesser than they. Thus Osbern Bokenham wrote in Chaucerian decasyllables the lives of several saints. Benet Burgh translated Cato's *Moralia* into verse, and completed the *Secrets of*

<sup>1</sup> Oscar Triggs, *The Assembly of Gods*, Introduction, Chapter III, p. xiv, E.E.T.S., 1896.

<sup>2</sup> H. N. McCracken, Ph.D., Introduction to the *Minor Poems of John Lydgate*, E.E.T.S., 1911.

<sup>3</sup> A recent attempt has been made, on quite insufficient evidence, to deprive Lydgate of this poem.

*Philosophers*, a poem which has been sometimes attributed to Lydgate. Benet's fondness for rime royal must be traced to Chaucer, and illustrates the fashion of the age. This stanza is used, or misused, by numerous contemporary writers, and is put to various, and often strange, uses: it is employed for scientific exposition by George Ripley and Thomas Norton, for political reflection by George Ashby, and for religious propaganda by John Audelay. Throughout the fifteenth century the Chaucerian influence persists in all manner of forms and quarters, without any more weighty result than has here been indicated.

The prosodic disintegration which accompanied it was prolonged into the sixteenth century, as may be seen from the writings of Stephen Hawes (1474 ?–1523 ?). Hawes was the last poet of the age following Chaucer to come strongly beneath his influence. For him, as for Gower and Lydgate, he had the strongest admiration, and throughout his works he constantly pays homage to the three. His two longest poems, *The Example of Virtue* (1504) and *The Pastime of Pleasure* (1506), are both allegories, dealing, under courtly imagery, with the life of man, and, as such, they reach back through Chaucer and Gower to *The Romaunt of the Rose*. It has been shown, however, that in working out these courtly allegories, Hawes 'emphasized the element of chivalrous romance',<sup>1</sup> and that this tendency, together with his strong interest in scholastic learning and theology, gives a distinctive colour to his poems. The *Pastime*, which is mainly in rime royal, and numbers nearly six thousand lines, describes the quest of the hero, Graund Amour, for La Bel Pucell, whom he eventually wins after a long series of trials and perils. He is brought into touch with the Quadrivium, part of the mediaeval scheme of education, but is so little deflected by it from the Active Life that he manages to destroy two giants, one of whom has three, the other seven, heads. He wins the Lady, is married to her by Law, and lives with her happily till Avarice and Old Age fall upon him, and he is claimed first by Contrition, then by Death. A humorous interlude is provided by the introduction of the dwarf Godfrey Gobelive, who is a professional slanderer of women, and tries to dissuade Graund Amour from his quest.

*The Example of Virtue*, also in rime royal, describes the adventures of Youth, his wanderings in the wilderness, his temptations by Sensuality and Pride, and his wedding with Cleanness, the daughter of Love. There is much other allegorical machinery, and at the end there are references to the political condition of England. Hawes's shorter poems include *The Conversion of Swearers*, *A Joyful Meditation to all England of the Coronation of Henry the Eighth*, and *The Comfort of Lovers*. The chief defects of his verse are its prolixity, metrical laxity and uncertainty, determined didacticism,

<sup>1</sup> William Murison, *Cambridge History of English Literature*, vol. ii, p. 228.

Hawes.



constant digressiveness, and preoccupation with abstract allegory. The *Pastime* dimly anticipates Spenser, and is a link between the *Faerie Queene* and the older English allegories deriving from the *Romaunt of the Rose*. But though Spenser's debts both to the *Pastime* and the *Example* are specific, the *Faerie Queene*, in all essentials of genius and beauty, is a thing generically different from anything that Hawes ever wrote, or could have hoped to write. His hopeless inferiority is due not only to the limitations of the period, but also to those of his own temperament and equipment.

## CHAPTER VII

### SCOTTISH POETRY

The Beginnings — The Scottish Chaucerians — Popular Poetry —  
Lyndsay to Montgomerie.

A Late  
Begin-  
ning.

SCOTTISH literature before the middle of the fourteenth century is a thing of mere fragments, and brings to light no single author of historical standing—for Thomas of Ercildoune, poet and seer, must, unfortunately, be regarded as a figure of legend. Various causes have been assigned for this strange barrenness. During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Scotland was divided between various races—Pict, Scot, Anglian, Anglo-French, and Danish. The resulting multiplicity of tongues did not make for a national literature, even if any of the races had been capable of supplying one. The language commonly known as 'Early Scots' was spoken between the Tweed and the Forth, and in the towns along the mid-east coast. It was in reality Northern English, and was practically identical with the language spoken between the Tweed and the Humber.<sup>1</sup> It is claimed that owing to this identity certain works actually of Scotch origin may have been attributed to the north of England. A more likely reason for the dearth, at least during the latter part of the period, lies in the terrible turmoil and peril arising out of the Scottish wars with England. During these days of storm, men's hands were devoted rather toward keeping their heads than toward the penning of verse. Yet if this warfare for the time being hindered poetry, in the end it helped and quickened it, and made it the expression of a national faith and aspiration; for the two most lengthy and important of early Scotch poems deal respectively with the two great heroes of Scottish independence.

Barbour's  
Bruce.

The *Bruce* (1376) of John Barbour (1316 ?–1395) is less a history of King Robert than a historical romance woven

<sup>1</sup> See Sir James Murray, *Dialects of the Southern Counties of Scotland*; and Peter Giles, 'The Earliest Scottish Literature', *Cambridge History of English Literature*, vol. ii, chap. v.



around his exploits and perils. Its best scenes are vivid and straightforward, and its outstanding characters—the king himself, Edward Bruce, and James of Douglas—are drawn with a noble simplicity. Barbour's narrative gift is seen at its highest in his descriptions of Bannockburn, and in such other passages as that relating the king's escape from the sleuth-hound and 'meinie' of John of Lorne, and his subsequent flight across the moor. The struggle of the weary and overwatched hero with the three traitors in the bothie is one which Stevenson might have been proud to pen. Several other passages in the poem are hardly less good. Barbour is at times pedestrian; but he is also capable of such flights as the famous praise of liberty which is the expression, not only of the man, but of his age and country:

A! fredome is a noble thing!  
 Fredome mayss men to have liking;  
 Fredome all solace to man gifis  
 He levys at ess that freely levys!  
 A noble hart may haiff nane ess  
 Ne ellys nocht that may him pless  
 Gyff fredome fail;he: for free liking  
 Is ʒharnyt our all othir thing.

Certain other poems of the period have also been attributed to Barbour—notably a collection of *Lives of the Saints*; two fragments of a *Troy-book* translated from the Latin of Guido delle Colonne; and a translation from the French, entitled *The Buik of Alexander*. It is on his *Bruce*, however, that his fame depends.

Nearly a century later the other hero of Scottish freedom received his due in the *Wallace* of Blind Harry. Harry, according to the fifteenth-century scholar and historian, John Major, was a blind minstrel, who wandered the country reciting for bread the deeds of its heroes. He claims to have based his narrative on a Latin book in which John Blair, Wallace's chaplain, had recorded his master's fights and wanderings. There may have been such a book, but we have no record of it; and Harry's easy defiance of historical fact and sequence shows that he set small store by authentic records. His treatment of history is far more loose than Barbour's, and he sometimes gives Wallace legendary powers. Unlike Barbour, he expresses the bitterest hatred of England, and his invective against her can only be paralleled by the earlier invective of Minot against Scotland. His humour, of which there is plenty, is generally grim and sarcastic. At his best, he displays fine narrative and descriptive power, though his lapses into the commonplace are more frequent and distressing than Barbour's.

*The Bruce* is written in the octosyllabic, *Wallace* in the heroic, couplet. Blind Harry's contemporary, Richard Holland, or de Holand, in writing his *Buke of the Howlat*, employs the alliterative rhyming stanza so greatly favoured

Blind Harry's  
*Wallace*.

Other Early  
Writers.

by the romancers of the period. Some have attempted, without much reason or success, to interpret this poem as a political allegory, dealing satirically with James II; in point of fact, it is simply what it purports to be, a fable based on the 'humours' of various birds, who assemble in conclave to listen to the plaint of the owl against Nature. Certain tedious digressions apart, the poem is both amusing and charming.

The identity and output of 'Huchoun of the Awle Royale', together with the Scottish romances of the period, are discussed elsewhere: if, as seems possible, Huchoun be identical with Sir Hew of Eglintoun, Scotland during the fourteenth century possessed a notable writer of romances. It possessed beyond all doubt an industrious and imaginative, if not very poetic, chronicler in Andrew Wyntoun, Prior of St. Serf's in Loch Leven, and Canon Regular of St. Andrews. In his *Original Chronicle*, written in rhymed octosyllables, he traces the history of Scotland back to its imagined 'origines' in the legendary past. The early part of this work consists largely of marvels, scriptural and other, but the later has a certain historical value. History and legend blend in the tale of Macbeth, which is related in the Sixth Book. Of the remaining chroniclers of the period, the most notable were John of Fordun and Walter Bower, who worked in succession on the long Latin compilation known as the *Scotichronicon*.

Native  
and  
Southern  
Influ-  
ences.

Scottish literature, as we have hitherto described it, lacked tradition, and was a thing of beginnings: yet these beginnings had their origin in a spirit of robust nationalism, which found its natural expression in martial poetry. Cognate with this was another native impulse which found utterance in poems of satire, love, and coarse and racy merriment. These songs and lampoons are written by poets of the people, and express the people's joys and hates and sorrows. They continue throughout the whole course of Scotch literature, and find their culmination in such great national singers as Fergusson and Burns. For a time, however, this native poetry was overshadowed by a more courtly and literary tradition deriving from the south, which produced some of Scotland's most exquisite poetry, and during the fifteenth century gave her the poetic mastery of England. We may deal with this at once, reserving the popular verse for later notice.

Scottish  
Prosody.

It has been shown that Chaucer's English followers and disciples went astray largely through their failure to understand the secrets of his prosody. One of the chief causes of their discomfiture had been the disintegration caused in English metre through the inflexional changes of the period, and especially through the dubious quality of the final -e. In the Scottish language of the period, which, as we have seen, differed only slightly from Northern English, there was little of this linguistic or prosodic ambiguity, for the inflexions had early become levelled under common forms, and poets were not confronted with the metrical difficulties which had discom-



fited Lydgate and Occleve. But the difference in quality between the English and the Scottish poetry of the time can certainly not be accounted for by mere considerations of prosody and dialectal form. The Scots poets had not only a fitter and surer medium of poetry; they had greater genius as well. Lydgate, had he lived north of the Tweed, could never have written anything so finished as the *King's Quair*, or so powerful as *The Testament of Cresseid*: and, conversely, had Dunbar or Henryson written in the English midlands, it is incredible that they could have ever sunk into the slough of *The Temple of Glass*.

Four great poets stand out in the Scottish literature of the period. Each of these professed direct allegiance to Chaucer and—*magno intervallo*, it may be imagined—to Gower and Lydgate. James I speaks of the first two of these as his 'maisteris dere': Henryson, in the homely and delightful introduction to the *Testament of Cresseid*, proclaims himself disciple of 'Chaucer glorious'. Dunbar styles Chaucer 'reverend', and the 'rose of rethoris all', and writes:

O morall Gower and Lydgate laureate,  
Your sugarit lippis and toungis aureate  
Bene to our eris cause of great delight;

and Gavin Douglas, the least Chaucerian of the four, cannot abstain from praising Chaucer even in the prologues to his 'Eneids'; elsewhere he hails him as

*A per se sans pair*  
In his vulgair.

The influence of Chaucer affects both the spirit and the form of all these men, and manifests itself in obvious and more subtle ways throughout their work.

Most obviously Chaucerian are the uses made by the first three of rime royal, and by all four of allegory. *The King's Quair*, or *King's Book*, the first great Chaucerian poem of Scotland, is written throughout in the great seven-lined stanza beloved by the Master, and in its allegorical setting it shows a close acquaintance, not only with Chaucer's original work, but also with his translation of *The Romaunt of the Rose*. King James I's authorship of the poem, though it has been disputed, is now established beyond all doubt by the scholarship of M. Jusserand. It is in great part an allegory set in the form of a dream, in which the royal poet appears before Venus, and, subsequently, before Minerva and Fortune, and beseeches their help in his woful plight of love. This passage is written with freshness, delicacy, and grace, and will stand comparison with the finest allegorical passages of Chaucer himself. There is fine quality, too, in the opening stanzas of the poem, which describe how the poet tires of reading Boethius, falls into slumber after musing on Fortune, and is aroused by the matin-bell, which, as he thinks, bids him tell of his adventure. But to most readers the chief charm of the *Quair* lies in the

The Scot-  
tish Chau-  
cerians.

James I—  
*The King's*  
*Quair*.



scene in which the King, leaning forth from the window of the English castle which is his prison, sees

The fairest or the freschest yong floure  
That ever I saw, methoght, before that houre,  
For which sodayn abate, anone astert  
The blude of all my body to my hert.

A charming passage follows in description and praise of the lady; and its charm is heightened when we remember that she was Lady Joan Beaufort, who eventually became James's queen, and was present at his tragic death. The King's gallant and romantic nature is delightfully evident in the concluding passage, where, now that his boon is granted, he blesses all things concerned with the vision of his beloved:

Thankit mot be, and fair and lufe befall,  
The nychtingale that with so gud entent  
Sang thare of lufe the notis suete and small,  
Qubahir my fair hertes lady was present

And thankit be the fair castell wall,  
Quhare as I quhilom lukit furth and lent.  
Thankit mot be the sanctis marciall  
That me first causit hath this accident.  
Thankit mot be the grene bewis bent,  
Throu quhom and under, first fortunyt me  
My hertis hele, and my comfort to be

Henryson  
—*The  
Testament  
of Cres-  
seid.*

James's rime royal moves with great smoothness, and his poem is full of graceful beauty; but there are not only beauty and grace but tragic intensity in *The Testament of Cresseid*, by Robert Henryson (1425 ?–1500 ?). This poem, which is in rime royal, is, in effect, a continuation of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*; but it presents a remarkable sequence and contrast of moods and motifs. It opens with a passage of intimate and homely realism, showing the poet gazing at the stars on a bitter, but beautiful, winter's night. Unable longer to bear the cold, he passes to the fire, mends it, and takes 'ane drink' his 'spreitis to comfort'. He then opens *Troilus*, and musing on Cressida's fate, resolves to write its sequel. First he shows her cast off by Diomedes and abusing Venus and Cupid very angrily. This gives him the opportunity of introducing what may be called the pageantry of the poem—to wit, a conclave of the gods, who debate as to what shall be her punishment for her outrage against Love. This long passage contains much pride, pomp, and classical circumstance, and is admirable of its kind. The poem shifts suddenly to tragic realism, when the dreadful doom of leprosy is inflicted on Cressida by Saturn, and she is told that she

must go begging from hous to hous  
With cop and clapper like ane lazarous.

She goes to the spittal-house, and there sings a dirge for her dead happiness. Driven to beg by the road-side with her

mates in leprosy, she is passed by Troilus riding Troyward with his knights. The passage which follows is a wonderful and authentic piece of psychology. He does not recognize her, but her face recalls to him the old memory of his love :

Yit than hir luik into his mind it brocht  
The sweet visage and amorous blenking  
Of fair Crisseid, sometyme his awin darling.

For old sake's sake, he empties gold and jewels into her lap and rides away, brooding on his grief. When the leper-folk crowd round Cressida 'to see the equal distribution of the almous', she learns who her benefactor has been, falls to earth in a 'bitter stound' of grief and contrition, and dies.

This wonderful tragic poem, despite certain opinions to the contrary, must certainly be considered Henryson's greatest work; but he would have ranked as a poet of note had he written his *Moral Fables* alone. These are thirteen in number, and are written in rime royal, which Henryson here adapts with masterly skill to comic ends. He retells with great freshness and gusto many of the tales attributed to Aesop, including the Wolf and the Lamb, the Frog and the Mouse, and the Mouse and the Lion. He had a keen eye for nature, and his account of the joys and sufferings of the different birds and beasts is not only charming, but true to their characters and habits. One of the best things in the whole collection is the tale of the *Uplandis Mous and the Burgess Mous*, in which the two wee beasts become warm and living personalities, and are described with the most vivid humour. Each fable concludes with a *moralitas*, but the didactic purpose is never allowed to kill the charm of the tales, which in their homely zest and realism represent a native element of Scottish poetry.

The *Moral Fables*.

Henryson's remaining long poem, *Orpheus and Euridice*, is written in various metres—chiefly in rime royal—and concludes with a lengthy *moralitas*. The tale is sufficiently well told, but lacks the genius which went to the making of the *Testament* and the *Fables*. That genius, however, is richly evident in Henryson's third poem of note, *Robin and Makyn*, in which the conventional French *pastourelle* is fashioned into a new and delightful thing by the poet's lively sense of character and of Nature. The graceless lout, Robin, is wooed by the fair shepherdess, Makyn, and at first the wooing is vain: Robin goes his way 'als licht as lief of tree', and leaves Makyn disconsolate. But Love has his revenge on the scorner, and in the 'full fair dale' where he has mustered his sheep, it fills him with desire of the scorned. He makes his court to Makyn, but she is now heart-free, and can tell him that

*Robin and Makyn*.

The man that will not when he may  
Sall haif nocht quhen he wald.

The poem ends with a brief passage in which he urges his love, and amid the warmth and passion of the summer's night craves



that he may have his will ; but she tells him that ‘ that world is all away and quite brocht till ane end ’ : and she leaves him alone with his care and his sheep among the grey hills.

Henryson also wrote several shorter poems, the most notable of which are *The Bludy Sark*, and the *Garmond of Guid Ladies*.

Dunbar.

It has been seen that both the native and derivative elements are strong in Henryson’s poetry, and the same is the case with the third great ‘ Scottish Chaucerian ’, William Dunbar (1460 ?–1520). Dunbar is Henryson’s inferior in emotional intensity and tragic sense ; but his vigour and frequent beauty of expression, his mastery of humour and satire, and his keen feeling for natural loveliness, explain, if they do not justify, Scott’s statement that his poetry was ‘ unrivalled by any which Scotland ever produced ’. None of his poems exceeds six hundred lines ; but in them he displays a more various mastery than can be credited to any of his three chief Scottish contemporaries. The statements that he is the ‘ Scottish Chaucer ’ and the ‘ Scottish Skelton ’, are not more wise than other comparisons of the kind, and their very juxtaposition betrays their untrustworthiness : yet Chaucer’s influence is strong throughout the best part of Dunbar’s work, and is perhaps most obvious in such courtly allegories as *The Golden Targe*, and *The Thistle and the Rose*. In the first of these Reason endeavours to guard the poet with her shield against the darts of love ; but vainly, for he is

wounded till the deth well nere,  
And yoldyn as a woful prisonere  
To Lady Bewty in a moment space.

The conventional themes of the May-morning, the dream, and the song of the birds are managed with great charm, and with a keenly individual sense of

Nature’s nobil fresche anamalyng  
In mirthful May of every monith quene.

The birds’ song is heard again throughout *The Thistle and the Rose*, a courtly allegory of the marriage of James IV with Mary, ‘ the freschest quene of flouris ’. Another allegory, *Beauty and the Prisoner*, is at once didactic and spectacular, and has been thought by some to portray one of the pageants which Dunbar had witnessed in England. Still allegorical, but far more forcible and realistic, is *The Dance of the Seven Deadly Sins*, which is written with a rare swing, and displays<sup>1</sup> that delight in vivid words, whether homely or strange, which is constant throughout Dunbar, and is indulged with astonishing gusto in his longest poem, *The Tua Maryit Wemen and the Wedo*.

<sup>1</sup> For example in the description of the retinue of ‘ Covatyce ’ :

Catyvis, wrechis and okkeraris,  
Hud-pykis, hurdaris and gadderaris,  
All with that warlo went.

His alle-  
gorical  
poems.



This is a *tour de force* in more ways than one: prosodically it is a daring experiment in the revived, and by now rapidly declining, alliterative measure: in general spirit it is a remarkable blend of beauty and coarse realism. The opening passage, describing the garden and the graces of the women who converse in it, is one of the most charming things in Dunbar: their descriptions of their husbands outgo in frank brutality the disclosures of the Wife of Bath herself, and are at once diabolical and convincing. That formidable female doubtless supplied Dunbar with suggestions for the poem; but over and above the southern influence there runs throughout the satiric portraiture a *perfervidum ingenium* which seems native to the northern poet and his race. There is hardly less gusto in *The Friars of Berwick*, which has been traditionally ascribed to Dunbar, and on internal evidence may well be his. Vigour, coarseness, and an exultant mastery of abuse are evident in *The Flyting of Kennedy and Dunbar*, in which the two poets belabour and befoul each other, apparently by mere way of exercise and in perfect good humour. The peculiar national tendency toward satire, both public and private, which is to recur so strongly in Burns, is evident in several of Dunbar's poems, and most notably, perhaps, in the *Tidings from the Session*. The session is not, as in Burns's case, the Kirk-Session but the Scottish Session of Law. Notable among the fairly numerous remaining poems of Dunbar are the whimsical *Ballad of Kynd Kittock* and the *Lament for the Makaris*, with its poignant refrain, '*Timor mortis conturbat me*,' and its interesting references to the author and his fellow-poets. Some of Dunbar's finest work is contained in his religious poems, notably in the *Resurrection of Christ* and the fragment on *Life*.

The fourth great Scottish poet, Gavin Douglas (1474?–1522), like the remaining three, uses the conventions of allegory in certain of his works; but both in these and in the rest he displays an individuality which, if less powerful than theirs, is still very striking and distinguished. As Bishop of Dunkeld, and son of the great Earl of Angus, Archibald 'Bell-the-Cat', he was quite at home both in the learned and the courtly traditions of his age, with results which are evident throughout his poetry. To some, indeed,<sup>1</sup> his achievement and his peculiar interest in classicism have seemed to make him a direct forerunner of the Renaissance, and a half-conscious interpreter of its dawning spirit; but according to the better opinion,<sup>2</sup> his outlook, as manifested both in his original poetry and his translation of Virgil, is mediæval, and is not essentially different from that of his chief Scottish contemporaries. His *Palace of Honour*, indeed, has the familiar features of many allegories deriving from *The Romaunt of the Rose*, and can be readily paralleled in the work of Hawes, Oocleve, and Dunbar.

Gavin  
Douglas.

<sup>1</sup> See Professor Courthope, *History of English Poetry*, i. 374.

<sup>2</sup> See G. Gregory Smith, *Cambridge History of English Literature*, vol. ii, chapter x.

It portrays the garden, the maytime slumber, the appearance of Venus with her retinue, the poet's arraignment, his sentence, and expiation of his offence. Towards the end he sees and enters the Palace, is overcome by its glory, and awakes. A rather amusing character is the nymph who is told off to accompany and discipline the poet, and often treats him with scant courtesy.<sup>1</sup> The poem is well conceived and finished; like Dunbar, Douglas exults in coloured and telling words,<sup>2</sup> and he displays, too, something of Dunbar's lively love of Nature; but scarcely in this allegory do these things rise into high poetry, and Douglas's most distinctive work is not to be sought here, nor yet in *King Hart*, another sufficiently well-made allegory in octaves, showing the adventures, perils, and joys of the human heart.

Douglas's  
Version of  
*The*  
*Aeneid*.

Whatever be the deficiencies in point of pure scholarship or pure poetry of Douglas's version of 'Eneados of the most famos Poete Virgill', it remains a most notable work, being, indeed, 'the first translation of a great classical poet into English, Northern or Southern'. Douglas, in his 'Proloug of the First Buik', while heaping scorn on the 'faultes' of Caxton's version, freely admits his own, and at the same time claims the right to handle his original freely—a right which, as he defines it, would as freely be conceded him by every scholar who has ever attempted translation. His shortcoming lies not so much in his continuous departures from the letter of his original, as in his general failure to reproduce that spiritual depth and dignity which single Virgil out from the company of poets. But if his version is not Virgilian, it has a strength of its own, and it seems certain that that strength is mediaeval and does not cast forward to the Renaissance. The translation itself is in the heroic couplet, but Douglas employs a variety of metres in his 'Prolougs' to the several books. Many of these have only the remotest connexion with their subject; all of them may claim to rank as original poems in their own right, and the best contain Douglas's finest and most distinctive work. Particularly spirited is the Pro-

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Quhat devill (said scho) has thow nocht ellis ado,  
Bot all thy wit and fantasie to set  
On sic doting?

There are other amusing—and probably intentionally amusing—touches in the poem, e. g.

The dasy and the marygold unlappit  
Quhilks all the nicht lay with their levis happit,  
Thame to reserve fra rewmes pungitive.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. his description of the Palace:

Pinnakilis, fyellis, turnpekkis mony one,  
Gilt birneist torris, quhilk like to Phebus schone,  
Skarsment, reprise, corbell and battellingis,  
Fulzery, bordouris of mony precious stone,  
Subtile muldrie wrocht mony day agone,  
On buttereis, jalme, pillaris, and plesand springis.



logue to the Seventh Book, which, like a famous prologue of Henryson's, shows the poet working at his task amid the rigours of a Scottish midwinter. The whole passage is alive with that keen sense of Nature's moods and shows<sup>1</sup> which is constant throughout Scottish poetry. In the Twelfth Prologue<sup>2</sup> there is a prettier but less powerful picture of Summer, vocal with songbirds, and radiant with flowers. Somewhat less fine are the descriptions of sunset and sunrise in the Eleventh Prologue. The Eighth, which employs the alliterative romance stanza, is an astonishing piece of Scots, and seems to have been written out of its author's sheer joy in words. The First Prologue makes an interesting defence of Aeneas's treatment of Dido, and the Sixth, with its portrayal of Virgil as a Christian before Christ, and its defence of his picture of Hell, would alone be sufficient to prove Douglas's mediaevalness of outlook, which is further evident from his recurrent praise of Chaucer.

Contemporary with the four just mentioned were a number of minor poets, some of whom are mentioned by Dunbar in his *Lament for the Makaris*, and others by Gavin Douglas in *The Palace of Honour*. The chief claim to renown of Walter Kennedy (1460 ?-1508 ?) rests on his *Flyting* with Dunbar: he has also left a few short poems of small value. The single poem—*The Adventures of a Courtier*—left by Quintyne Shaw hardly justifies the high place awarded him by Douglas. The remaining poets in this class are little more than names.

Minor  
Scottish  
Poets.

We have already noticed that side by side with the courtly and derivative strain in Scottish poetry, there existed a spontaneous and native one, and that this had been given utterance even by the Chaucerians themselves. It reappears in simpler and more characteristic form in a considerable number of poems, many of which are preserved to us in those very precious collections, the Asloan, the Bannatyne, and the Maitland MSS. Most of these pieces are anonymous: nearly all of their dates are uncertain: but in many cases they go back far beyond the period we have just reviewed. Many of them are romances or ballads, and as such are discussed elsewhere in this volume. The rest deal, often very coarsely,

Scottish  
Popular  
Poetry.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Dym skyis oft furth warpit feirful levyne,  
Flaggis of fyir, and mony felloun flawe,  
Sharp soppis of sleit, and of the snypannd snaw.  
The dowy dichis war all donk and wait,  
The law vaille flodderit all wyth spait,  
The plane stretis and every hie way  
Full of fluschis, doubbis, myre and clay.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. The flour delice furth spred his hevinly hew,  
Flour dammes, and columby blank and blew;  
Seyr downis smaill on dent de lion sprang,  
The yong grene blomyt straberry levis amang;  
Gymp gerrafouris thar royn levys unshet,  
Fresh pymros and the purpour violet.



with a variety of themes dear to the popular mind, such as love, satire, fun, and drink. The two most famous poems of this class, *Christ's Kirk on the Green* and *Peebles to the Play*, describe with great spirit the merriment and wild horseplay of a Scottish village festival. Both are written in a ten-lined rhyming alliterative stanza, and both have been assigned at different times to James I, and to James V, of Scotland. It has been claimed that their language indicates a later authorship than that of the first monarch; but this argument has not been stated with sufficient force to deprive him of the poems, and tradition is all in favour of his keeping them. Two other poems, *Rauf Coilyear* and *John the Reeve*, which have been discussed in an earlier chapter, represent a recurrent theme of popular verse, the entertainment of a king by a doughty man of the people, who is ignorant of his identity, and subsequently visits the Court and finds his guest.

A kindred aspiration of the people is satisfied in the third part of that very curious production, *Colkelby's Sow*, in the raising of the stalwart peasant, Flammislie, to the earldom of Flanders. The first part of the poem describes the 'feill ferlifull deidis' with which the Sow discomfits those who had assembled to kill and cook her. *Sir John Rowll's Cursing* of the stealers of his fowls has been voted dull by some; but there is a certain humour, Rabelaisian through its amassment of detail no less than through its coarseness, in the terrific lists of torments intended for the miscreants. *Sym and his Brother* makes fun of two St. Andrews palmers good-humouredly, yet in a way which seems to indicate that the more venomous satire against church abuses which was to follow in the work of Lyndsay, had for long had a basis in popular feeling. Lyndsay's moralizing tendency finds its counterpart in *The Three Priests of Peebles*, a sequence of tales which, despite their didacticism, are by no means dull. Bacchanalian poetry is well represented by the *Ballad of Allan o' Maut*, with its effective refrain, 'Why could not Allan honorit be?' The duel of sex, so often a theme of fun in the popular domestic ballad, is comically handled in *The Wife of Auchtermuchty* and *The Dumb Wife*. In both of these the husband is discomfited, in the first case because he has attempted to play housewife, in the second because he has foolishly made his dumb wife speak with the aid of magic. A very curious kind of poem is that which flings together at haphazard marvels of fairy lore or popular superstition. Such a poem is *Lichtoun's Dream*: another fragment tells of

the great king of Babylon, Berdok,  
That dwelt in summer until ane bowkill<sup>1</sup> stok,  
And into winter, when the frosts are fell,  
He dwelt for cauld intil a cockkil shell.

A third poem tells many quaint wonders of the Gryre-Carling,

<sup>1</sup> Cabbage.

or Scotch Mother-Witch. The theme of love is treated humorously in *Jock and Jinny*, which foreshadows Allan Gray; and with a pathos worthy of Henryson himself, in *The Mourning Maiden*. Though these popular songs and tales do not often reward the seeker for pure poetry, it is they, and not the more exquisite Chaucerian verse, which prepare the way for such national singers as Ramsay, Fergusson, and Burns.

In capacity for pure poetry, Sir David Lyndsay (1490?—1555?) is certainly inferior to all of the four great Scottish poets discussed earlier in this chapter, yet he had much of the vigour and satiric power which we have recognized in at least three of them; and his early work shows that, like them, he had felt the spell of Chaucer. Yet, in the great body of his writings, Chaucer's influence plays but little part, and his most considerable production, the *Satire of the Three Estates*, owes its formal characteristics not to him but to the example of the early drama. Furthermore, the satire which was his main strength is not Chaucer's satire. This had been devoted almost entirely to enhancing interest of story or character: Lyndsay's was primarily didactic and political, and had for its chief object the welfare of Scotland.

This political obsession appears strongly even in his earliest work, *The Dreame*, though this is strongly coloured by the influence of Chaucer, transmitted through Dunbar and Gavin Douglas. In this poem, the poet makes a progress of the universe under the guidance of Dame Remembrance, who in her grace and benevolence differs notably from the caustic nymph of *The Palace of Honour*. She takes him through heaven, hell, and all the spheres, gives him a survey of earth and a succinct list of its chief countries, and transports him to the Earthly Paradise, and hence, by a rather abrupt transition, to sixteenth-century Scotland. Arrived there, the poet inveighs against the abuses of his country through several pages of rime royal, sheeting the responsibility home to Scotland's rulers, and ending with a solemn appeal to the youthful James V to govern righteously. In the charming prologue to this poem, Lyndsay describes his ingenious methods of entertaining the monarch during his attendance on him in his babyhood.

In the *Complaint to the King's Grace* he warns James solemnly against corruption, and, especially, ecclesiastical corruption; and he concludes with a brightly expressed but quite serious aspiration, that the king will advance his mentor's welfare. The inveterate scorn which Lyndsay always felt, or professed to feel, for ecclesiastical wrong-doers, appears once more in the *Testament and Complaint of our Sovereign Lord's Papyngo*, in which the king's parrot, being on the point of death, delivers itself concerning the abuses of the realm. The first part of this poem staggers under a heavy load of didacticism, but the second contains some pleasing

Lyndsay.

*The  
Dreame.*



passages, notably the dialogue between the papyngo and those unwelcome ecclesiastics, the magpie, the raven and the hawk, who pretend to shrive it, and finally rend and bear away its half-cold body. A more pretentious and less readable production is *A Dialogue between Experience and a Courtier*, which extends to six thousand lines of octosyllabic couplet, and describes the whole history, religious and secular, of the universe, from the Creation to the Day of Doom. Lyndsay put the couplet to far better use in the *History of Squire Meldrum*, in which he describes his neighbour's adventures in love and war with spirit, charm, and occasional strokes of friendly fun.

The *Satire of the Three Estates*.

The *Satire of the Three Estates* is a political morality play, and as has been frequently noticed, it is in some sense a counterpart to the English political moralities of John Bale. Nominally its chief character is Rex Humanitas, whose favour is sought, after approved 'morality' fashion, by such competing vices and virtues as Sensuality and Deceit, Chastity and Good Counsel. Much more interesting, however, and evidently much more near to Lyndsay's heart, is John the Commonweal, who symbolizes Scotland, and makes his complaint against the two temporal estates and the single ecclesiastical one. It is significant of Lyndsay's point of view that whereas the temporal estates repent and amend their ways, 'Spirituality' declines to do this, and justifies her general conduct in a passage containing some of the poet's keenest and most ironical wit. The interest of the play lies partly in such strokes as this, partly in its interludes, which contain vivid pictures of Scottish peasant life, and are lit both with humour and with a *saeva indignatio* against the clerical oppressors of the poor. The *Satire* numbers some five thousand lines, and, as we are informed by the proclamation made on its performance at Cupar-Fife, it began at seven in the morning and continued throughout the whole day.

Lyndsay's strong anti-clerical bias appears again in *Kitty's Confession*, a lively diatribe against the auricular confession of women by priests, and in *The Tragedy of the Cardinal*, written shortly after the death of Beaton, whom it savagely attacks. The *Answer to the King's Flyting* is Lyndsay's contribution to a poetical jousting between himself and the 'Guidman of Ballengeich', on whose gallantries it throws a curious light. The king's poem has been lost. Chief among Lyndsay's remaining minor poems are the *Deploration of Queen Magdalene*, an elegy on the death of James's first queen, and *The Petition of Bagsche*, an amusingly conceived sermon delivered by an old sinner of a hound to several younger dogs.

Minor Scottish Poets.

Lyndsay, in a well-known passage of the *Complaint of the Papyngo*, mentions several contemporary poets, including Sir James Inglis, Stewart of Lorne, Kyd, and Bellenden. Many of their poems appear in the Maitland and Bannatyne MSS., but few are of any value. Somewhat more important is the



verse of Sir Richard Maitland (1496–1586), who compiled the valuable literary collection bearing his name. Some of his poems are religious ; but he appears to greater advantage in his *Satires on the Age and on the Town Ladies*, in the former of which he becomes an effective *laudator temporis acti*. More terse and incisive is his short poem *On the Folly of an Old Man's marrying a Young Woman*. His lines *Against the Thieves of Liddesdale* throw a grim light on the turbulence of the Scottish border. His poetic quality, however, is very thin. A far truer note is heard in the poetry of Alexander Scott (1525–1584), who has a lyric gift greatly in advance of his age. His best love poems—*Oppressed heart, endure, To Love unloved, Lo, what it is to love*—are quickened by strong personal feeling which is all the more moving for its infusion of bitterness. In the *Jousting Betwixt Adamson and Sym, Kirk on the Green*, and the result is racy and amusing. No amusement and very little interest can be found in two long allegories, *The Seven Sages* and *The Court of Venus*, written by John Rolland about the year 1560.

Though the work of Alexander Montgomerie (1556 ?–1610 ?) falls somewhat outside our period, he may conveniently be noticed here, as he has much in common with the older 'makars'. His best-known poem is *The Cherry and the Sloe*, a lengthy allegory which hovers somewhat disconcertingly between romantic love and moral edification. Its best part is its commencement, in which the conventional pictures of Nature, which Montgomerie took over from preceding allegories, are freshly revived by a skilful hand. There is great charm in the description of the river foaming over crags into its deep 'lyn', with the lowly and bitter sloe beside it, and, overhead, the sweet red cherries of the poet's desire. The latter part of the poem is overcrowded with abstractions, and tends to become wearisome. The quatorzain in which it is written has a seductive wheel and chime, and owes much of its effect to the cunning internal rhymes of the concluding quatrain. This metre, which may possibly be of Montgomerie's invention, was afterwards used consummately by Burns. Montgomerie wrote a good deal of miscellaneous verse, including seventy sonnets, a coarsely abusive *Flyting*, of the conventional type, directed against Sir Patrick Hume of Polwarth, and one particularly charming lyric with an effective refrain, 'The night is near gone.'

Mont-  
gomerie.

## CHAPTER VIII

## BALLADS AND LYRICS

Origins of  
the Ballad  
—the com-  
munal  
theory.

It will be seen from the last chapter that during the fifteenth century, official poetry—if this term may be applied to poetry of definite authorship—seldom reached a high standard; but for this there is a definite alleviation in the rare beauty of the anonymous lyric and ballad poetry of the period. The early history of the English ballad is obscure and vast; the controversy concerning it shares the nature of infinity. It is certain that the ballad in Western Europe was originally composed in order to be sung with recitative and chorus as an adjunct to dancing. It is therefore lyrical in its origin, and is closely connected with the *carole* or French round dance. ‘The proper form of the ballads is that of the *carole* with narrative substance added.’<sup>1</sup> To this connexion are due the refrain which still survives in many ballads, and doubtless also the ‘incremental repetitions’, or variations of the same statement, in successive stanzas. Attempts have been made, chiefly by certain American writers, to assume that because the authors of ballads are unknown, they are to be regarded not as professional singers but as obscure members of the village community on whom the gift of song suddenly descended during the dance, much as the gift of prayer descends on Salvationists at a revival meeting. ‘They are not professional poets or minstrels,’ says Professor Gummere, ‘but members of the folk.’ Professor Kittredge goes further, and claims that the ‘process of improvisation is not a solitary act’ but one ‘in which the audience participate’ after some mysterious fashion which gives them ‘a kind of share in the poetic act’. The Professor adds, after further speculation: ‘Thus we have arrived at a state of things which is in effect scarcely to be distinguished from the supposedly inconceivable phenomenon of a numerous throng composing poetry with one voice.’

This conclusion, which is an extreme expression of the ‘communal theory’ of the ballad’s origin, seems to the present writer to be based on mere conjecture, unsupported by any weight of evidence or probability. The actual facts concerning the birth of ballads are so scanty that it is as difficult to marshal them for the refutation of this theory as for its demonstration; but the burden of proof certainly lies with those who advance a conjecture so utterly out of keeping with all the known facts of literary composition, and that burden so far has never been satisfactorily shouldered. Most folk who know and love poetry would surely rebel at the idea that *Glasgerion* and *The Wife of Usher’s Well*, with their exquisite,

<sup>1</sup> W. P. Ker, *English Mediaeval Literature*.



if primitive, artistry, and their perfect unity of feeling, were produced by any kind of improvisation, least of all by the many-mouthed improvisation of the many-headed. Even were the assumption granted, it could account only for a crude, short, and primitive form of the ballads, and not for the extended and comparatively finished narrative form in which most of them now survive. This would have to be explained, and is explained, by the more extreme 'communalists' through the assumption of a secondary communal process of gradual revision and addition hardly less mysterious or better authenticated than the first. In default of more convincing explanations, we may assume that there was a definite, individual, author for each of the ballads, that he composed these before, and not at, the choral singing, and that in the case of the best ballads thus produced, the original form was similar in general characteristics to our own. Furthermore, as the choral dance was by no means solely confined to villagers—to the 'people' as contrasted with the gentry and aristocracy—there is no reason for assuming that the ballad poet was the artless simpleton postulated by extreme communalist conjecture. Rather may we agree with Professor Child that 'the ballad is not the product or the property of the common orders of the people'.

It has been shown that in Denmark and elsewhere certain Ballad surviving historical ballads go back to the eleventh century. and In England a poem on the subject of Judas, generally Romance. classed as a ballad, is found in a thirteenth-century manuscript; but ballads in the ordinary sense of the term—ballads with a story in them such as *Sir Patrick Spens*, or *The Mill-dams of Binnorie*—are not found in any quantity till late in the Middle Ages, and hardly at all before the fifteenth century. Some ballads are derived from romances; but many are not, and that view cannot be seriously entertained which regards the ballad form as a degradation of, or even as a derivation from, the romance form. Professor Ker has, indeed, indicated an essential difference between the two kinds when he shows that the ballads generally end tragically, whereas the romances do not. The ballad in this respect is more akin to the older epic poetry, to which it is related 'not by derivation but by sympathy'. The earlier and more imaginative English ballads are at once epical or narrative, tragical, and lyrical. But it is to their lyrical element and their connexion with the choral dance that they owe their peculiar sweetness, simplicity, and emotional intensity.

The ballad probably passed out of its choral stage toward Present the beginning of the fifteenth century, and was recited in- Form of stead of being sung. This may have led to the amplification the of certain ballads already in existence, though such amplifi- Ballads. cation was probably of definite authorship, and must be carefully distinguished from the hypothetical communal growth to which reference has just been made. In any case,

a longer variety of the ballad became popular, one adapted to the art of the reciter rather than of the singer, and now lacking the choral refrain. To this class belong many, though by no means all, of the historical ballads, and of those dealing with Robin Hood. Several of this last variety attain the length, though not the nature, of the epic. As 'the longer recital tended to become more prevalent, the shorter form became more lyrical, so that it often becomes difficult to make any definite distinction between a ballad and a song'.<sup>1</sup> So far was oral transmission from improving the quality of the ballad that in most cases it corrupted and weakened it, and most students would agree with Professor Child that 'the ballad is at its best when it is early caught and fixed in print'. A further source of alteration must be sought in the liberties taken with certain of the old ballads by certain of their modern editors; but it would be heartless to apply the term 'corruption' to the debt, if not always scrupulous, strokes, by which Percy, and after him Scott, emended and amplified older versions. Many ballads exist in two or more variant forms. Practically all the available forms of all ballads extant in his day are preserved in the great collection of Professor Child,<sup>2</sup> whose name, together with the two names just mentioned, must be honoured wherever ballads are known and loved.

The chief varieties of the ballad can be distinguished here

<sup>1</sup> T. F. Henderson, *The Ballad in Literature*.

<sup>2</sup> *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, five vols., Boston and New York, 1882-98, reissued with certain abridgements, by Helen Child Sargent and George L. Kittredge, one vol., Boston, 1904. The earlier classic collections, in their best editions, are *The Percy Folio Manuscripts*, ed. J. W. Hales and F. J. Furnivall, three vols., London, 1867-8; and Scott's *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, edited and revised by T. F. Henderson, four vols., Edinburgh, 1902. See also *The Oxford Book of English Ballads*, chosen and edited by Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, Clarendon Press, 1910. For the 'communalist' hypothesis in its extreme form, see Kittredge's prefatory essay to the edition of Child just mentioned, and various publications by F. B. Gummere, notably *The Popular Ballad*, Boston and New York, 1907, and his article on Ballads in *The Cambridge History of English Literature*, vol. ii. For a cogent refutation of the theory see *The Ballad in Literature*, T. F. Henderson, Cambridge, 1912, a short work of great value for the general study of the form. On the subject generally see G. Gregory Smith, *The Transition Period*, London, 1900; F. Sidgwick's introduction (1903) to his *Popular Ballads of the Olden Time*; Andrew Lang's articles on the Ballad in *Chambers's Cyclopaedia*, 1902, and in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1910; W. P. Ker's *Epic and Romance*, 1897; his *English Mediaeval Literature* (*Home University Library*); and his very notable article *On the History of the Ballads, 1100-1500*, *Proceedings of the British Academy*, vol. iv. Various Continental works bear directly or indirectly on the history of the form in England. Among the most notable of these are S. H. Grundtvig's *Danmarks Gamle Folkeviser*, five vols., Copenhagen, 1853-1890, and *Les Origines de la Poésie lyrique en France au moyen âge*, by Alfred Jeanroy, 1889.



in the briefest outline only. Most beautiful of all are those Ballads of which deal with magic or romance. In *Thomas the Rhymer*, Magic. the Queen of Elfland betrays her lover with a kiss to seven years of service in her grim and wondrous country. In *Tam Lin*, the lover is similarly enthralled by the 'Queen o' Fairies', but is rescued by a fair lady of earth who holds him fast in her arms throughout fearsome transformations. In other cases the victim is a woman and the wooer a warlock; it is thus in the magical stanzas which show the Daemon Lover speeding o'er the sea with the doomed bride whom he has tempted away from her husband and child:

'O haud your tongue o' weeping,' he says,  
'Let a' your follies a-bee;  
I'll show where the white lilies grow  
On the banks o' Italie.'

She hadna sailed a league, a league,  
A league but barely three,  
Till grim, grim grew his countenance  
And gurlly grew the sea.

'What hills are yon, yon pleasant hills,  
The sun shines sweetly on?'  
'O yon are the hills o' Heaven,' he said,  
'Where you will never won.'

In some ballads a dead lover visits one still living, and the sequel is generally tragic. The living visits the dead in *The Unquiet Grave*, which tells its story in language of a primitive intensity:

The twelve-month and a day being up,  
The dead began to speak:  
'Oh, who sits weeping on my grave,  
And will not let me sleep?'

'Tis I, my love, sits on your grave,  
And will not let you sleep;  
For I crave one kiss of your clay-cold lips,  
And that is all I seek.'

'You crave one kiss of my clay-cold lips;  
But my breath smells earthy strong;  
If you have one kiss of my clay-cold lips  
Your time will not be long.'

Where the tragedy or romance are human and not super- Ballads of human, there is perhaps still greater beauty. In certain Love and ballads, as in *Lord Thomas and Fair Annet*, a woman—in this Death. case the 'nut-brown bride'—murders her rival and is in turn slain by him for whom the deed was done. In *Little Musgrave and Lady Bernard* and *Old Robin of Portingale*, vengeance is taken by a wronged husband on his wife and her lover. A fairly frequent theme, developed elaborately in *The Lass of Lochroyan*, is that of a mother who cruelly interposes between

her son and his sweetheart and brings about the death of both. Equally tragic themes of love are developed in three particularly fine ballads, *Glasgerion*, *Clerk Saunders*, and *Child Waters*. A further theme which recurs in numerous ballads, sometimes with a happy, sometimes with a tragic sequel, is that of the conflict in a girl's heart and life between true love and the love chosen for her by her family. In one ballad of this class, *Lord Ingram and Childe Vyet*, Lady Maisry answers her father exquisitely :

Get up now, Lady Maisry,  
Put on your wedding-gown ;  
For Lord Ingram he will be here,  
Your wedding must be done.

' I'd rather be Childe Vyet's wife,  
The white fish for to sell,  
Before I were Lord Ingram's wife  
To wear the silk so well.

' I'd rather be Childe Vyet's wife,  
With him to beg my bread,  
Before I were Lord Ingram's wife  
To wear the gold so red.'

Somewhat apart, owing to its dialogue form, and its meditated and highly finished art, stands *The Nut-Brown Maid*, which has been classified by some as an 'art-ballad', in contradistinction to the 'ballads of the people'. The great beauty of its metre and alternating refrain, and its delicate sense of emotion and romance, give this idyll of the wild-wood place among the greatest poems of the century. Later it was re-handled artificially and rather distressingly by Prior. Its original grace and music make it a thing of indescribable charm.

Such are a few only of the chief themes taken up by the ballad of romance. In a slightly different class we find 'romance shading off into real history',<sup>1</sup> as in *Sir Patrick Spens*, *Hugh of Lincoln*, *The Queen's Marie*. Of the historical ballads the classic examples are *The Ballad of Otterbourne* and *The Hunting of the Cheviot*—in its later and less excellent version, *Chevy Chase*. Some spirited ballads of this variety deal with border feuds or forays. Several describe the dashing rescue of an imprisoned comrade, and here the historical ballads connect with certain of the *Robin Hood* class. Thus the two doughty outlaws and archers of the woodland, Adam Bell and Clym of the Cleugh, break into 'Carleile town' by themselves, and snatch William Cloudesley away from the Justice and Sheriff and whole assembled populace at the foot of the gallows-tree. The beauty of this proceeding lay in its perfect simplicity—the two archers good had only to put

Border  
Ballads.

<sup>1</sup> Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, Preface to the *Oxford Book of English Ballads*.



a 'bearing arrow' through the hearts of the two chief magistrates, and the whole martial populace melted away :

All the citizens fast 'gan fly,  
They durst no longer abide,  
There lightly they loosed Cloudesley  
Where he with ropes lay tied.

Of course it must not be forgotten that 'Carleile town' was a notoriously soft crib to crack—in the vainglorious opinion, at least, of the Scottish ballad-maker : being, indeed, the town from which the Bold Buccleugh, with but 'twenty Scots and ten'—or, historically speaking, about two hundred—had in Elizabeth's day rescued the redoubtable Kinmont Willie in the teeth of his arch-enemies, the 'False Sakelde' and the 'Keen Lord Scroope'.<sup>1</sup> Other admirable border ballads are *Jock o' the Side* and *Archie o' Cawfield*.

Of the ballads dealing with the green-wood, the fine *Robin and Gandelyn* is among the oldest. There is very spirited work throughout *A Little Geste of Robin Hood and his Meiny*, which is the longest of all the long Robin Hood poems, and constitutes by itself a whole collection of ballads. Perhaps the finest thing among all the green-wood ballads is *Robin Hood and the Monk*, with its magical opening :

In somer when the shawes be sheyne,  
And leves be large and long,  
Hit is full mery in feyre foreste,  
To here the foulys song :

To se the dere draw to the dale  
And leve the hillës hee,  
And shadow them in levës grene,  
Under the greenwood tree.

Many of the *Robin Hood* ballads exist in a debased broadside form ; but of the ballad generally in its decay no account can here be given. Not all of the later anonymous ballads are debased : some of them, as *Mary Ambree*, are spirited, others, as *Barbara Allen*, are delicately beautiful ; but their grace is not the grace of the earlier ballads, of such exquisite wildings as *Child Waters* and *Edward*. The charm of all these is the charm of simplicity, and it is felt even in their quaint lapses—in the stanza of *Young Bekie*, for instance, in which Isabel, the daughter of the King of France, prepares to free her languishing lover from prison :

Oh when she saw him, young Bekie,  
Her heart was wondrous sair,  
For the mice but and the bold rottons  
Had eaten his yellow hair ;

<sup>1</sup> The ballad of *Kinmont Willie* owes much, if not the whole, of its present form to the hand of Scott ; but we have no right to doubt his assurance that he drew on an original dealing explicitly with this exploit.

Robin  
Hood  
Ballads.

Ballads,  
old and  
new.

and in the more beautiful strangeness of *Bonnie Annie*, which describes how the ship's captain is forced to cast his sweet-heart overboard with his own hands, the crew holding that she brings the ship ill-luck :

He has ta'en her in his arms twa, lo, lifted her cannie,  
He has thrown her out owre-board, his ain dear Annie.

The corse it did float, the ship it did follow,  
Until that they came to the high banks of Yarrow.

' O I'd bury my love on the high banks of Yarrow  
But the wood it is dear and the planks they are narrow.'

He made his love a coffin o' the gowd sae yellow,  
And buried his bonnie love down in a sea valley.

These extracts, together with the more highly wrought ones previously quoted, will show how utterly different the early anonymous ballads are from the sophisticated modern variety of definite authorship. Their spell lies, above all things, in their utter freedom from self-consciousness ; and it is just here that *The Daemon Lover* and *The Laily Worm* differ from *The Ancient Mariner*, where the art is as self-conscious as it is consummate. Despite its wildness and wonder, there is little of the old ballad touch in this :

The very deep did rot : O Christ !  
That ever this should be !  
Yea, slimy things did crawl with legs  
Upon the slimy sea.

Around, about, in reel and rout,  
The death fires danced at night ;  
The water, like a witch's oils,  
Burnt green and blue and white.

Even where modern ballads are written by a master expressly on the older pattern, they will hardly deceive the initiated. Swinburne's posthumous ballads were written avowedly as such imitations ; but for all their plausibility they out-Herod Herod : their licence is too licentious, too studiously irregular, to convince.

We have seen that the ballad is closely connected in its origin with the *carole* or round dance, and this connexion gives it kinship with the anonymous lyric poetry of the period, much of which is very beautiful. Most notable of all are the carols, which owe their name, and something of their nature, to the dance just mentioned. Carols had been brought to England from France as early as the twelfth century, and were probably freely composed in English throughout the thirteenth ; but the finest and fullest collection of them is to be found in certain fifteenth-century manuscripts, most notably in the Sloane and the Bodleian (Eng. Poet E. 1). They have sometimes been attributed to the minstrels, but it is more probable that ' their authors were clerks, although, likely enough, clerks



of the errant persuasion'.<sup>1</sup> Their suggested origin in the folk song and pagan festival cannot be discussed here. Most of them show a lifting of the gloom which is so common in the earlier mediaeval religious poetry, and is doubtless a survival from Anglo-Saxon times. This new cheerfulness is due in part to their French origin, in part to the natural joy of the Christmas festival. It is often spiritual, as in

There is no rose of swich vertu  
As is the rose that bare Jhesu :

*Alleluia.*

For in this rose contained was  
Hevene and erth in litel space :

*Res miranda.*

The aungels sungen, the schepherds to,  
*Gloria in excelsis Deo,*

*Gaudeamus.*

It appears in a quieter form in 'I sing of a maiden that is makeless', the most exquisite of all the carols, and one of the most exquisite of all English religious poems. It recurs, often very charmingly, in the lullabies which spring naturally from the theme of Mary's motherhood :

Mary mother, I am thy child  
Thogh I be laid in stall,  
Lordës and dukes shall worship me  
And so shall kingës all.

Ye shall well see that kingës three  
Shall come the twelfthë day,  
For this behest give me thy brest,  
And sing, By by, lullay.

The spiritual exaltation of the season passes, in some cases, into material rejoicing in its good cheer, whence come carols of wassailry and the boar's head :

The boar's head in hand bring I,  
*Caput apri defero.*

There were also many secular poems in praise of drinking and revelry :

I care right nought, I take no thought  
For clothes to keep me warm ;  
Have I good drink, I surely think  
Nothing can do me harm.

For truly than I fear no man  
Be he never so bold,  
When I am armed and throughly warmed  
With jolly good ale and old.

Songs of  
Revelry  
and Love.

Henry VIII wrote several poems of good-fellowship and

<sup>1</sup> E. K. Chambers, *Some Aspects of Mediaeval Lyric*,

love which survive in the song-book bearing his name. Many English love-lyrics of the period derive from such French forms as the *pastourelle*, the *ballade*, and the *aube*, or song of the lover against dawn, familiar to all in *Romeo and Juliet*. There are also invectives against women, of the type which became familiar in the later broadside ballads. Other poems of moral counsel 'bring the eternal note of sadness in':

Earth upon earth would be a king;  
But how earth to earth shall, thinks he no thing:  
When earth biddeth earth his rents home bring,  
Then shall earth from earth have a hard parting.

## CHAPTER IX

### MISCELLANEOUS PROSE—PECOCK TO MALORY

Lack of tradition in prose—Pecock, Capgrave, Caxton, Berners, Malory.

Lack of  
Tradition  
in Prose.

IN prose, as in poetry, the fifteenth century was a period of no very momentous achievement. The fourteenth century had supplied it with no foundation on which a great prose literature might be built. Only after a hard struggle had the language of England made good its right to express the thought and feelings of Englishmen; and that right, even when won, was by no means unchallenged. The vernacular, owing to its lack of high tradition and its consequent uncertainty of form, was rejected by many in favour of Latin as a means of learned expression. In poetry Chaucer had set a tradition which, however interrupted and misunderstood, showed all men that English metre was capable of great and various things. In prose, despite the sudden glory of Mandeville, there had been no such tradition; and although in the following century certain writers strove to create one, there could obviously, as yet, be no such succession of finished work as was to follow in such an age as Dryden's.

Pecock.

Certain writings, however, are important as showing signs of effort and transition. Toward the middle of the century Reginald Pecock (1395-1460), Bishop of St. Asaph, and subsequently of Chichester, published his *Repressor of over-much blaming of the Clergy*, a work intended as a counterblast to the Lollards, but ultimately condemned by those in authority as heretical. His arguments do not concern us here: what does concern us greatly is that, like Wyclif, he deliberately chose English for the purpose of theological argument, and that his handling of it is clear and cogent. The vernacular at this period was necessarily lacking in technical terms fit to express logical and theological conceptions. Pecock set himself, with great ingenuity and will, to supply such terminology, giving contemporary words a fresh meaning, reviving archaisms, and



coining new words, both from Teutonic and Latin sources. His prose, if it lacks finish, is at least forcible and various.

More simple in style, as less technical in subject, is the *Chronicle of England*, the chief prose work in English of John Capgrave (1393–1464), friar of Lynn in Norfolk. Capgrave's English is terse and fairly workmanlike, but it lacks colour and distinction, and the native vigour to be found in the chief work of Sir John Fortescue (1394 ?–1476 ?), Chief Justice of England under Henry VI. In *The Difference between an Absolute and a Limited Monarchy*, Fortescue adapts the vernacular for legal disquisition, as Pecoek had adapted it for theological: yet his book is by no means merely technical: it contains much general comment on the social conditions of the time, and a very lively passage contrasting the characteristics of the French and English nations, much to the detriment of the former.

It is impossible here to deal in detail with the many minor treatises of the period, and with such collections of letters as that recording the interesting, but by no means always edifying, doings and ambitions of the Paston family.

Two of the greatest writers of the period are translators. Their work shows two things in chief—first, that they recognized the deficiencies of English when compared with languages backed by an older tradition; and second, that they were determined to draw upon such languages in order to make these deficiencies good. The position of one of these men, William Caxton (1425–1491), gave him special opportunities for realizing his desire. In 1476 he set up his famous press at Westminster, and thence continued to issue volumes till the year of his death. It has been claimed, with some justice, that he directed rather than followed the literary taste of his day; but his direction must have been in large measure conditioned by the response he expected, and we may therefore take his publications, and those of his successors, Richard Pynson and Wynkyn de Worde, as fairly indicating the general reading of the age.

Caxton, like all thinking men of his day, had the keenest admiration for Chaucer, and he showed this by printing the *Canterbury Tales*; but the books issued from his press are, for the most part, prose, and include devotional and didactic treatises, romances, and histories, freely blended, in general, with legend. About a third of his whole output consists of translations made either by himself or under his immediate direction. The earliest of these—the earliest book, indeed, printed in the English language—is the *Recuyell of the Histories of Troy*, in the preface of which he admits frankly, and with pardonable envy, the superiority of the French tongue at this period to the English. A more popular and considerable translation is the one made by him from the Latin and French versions of the *Golden Legend*, that mediaeval storehouse of wonder, piety, and saintly biography. His paraphrase, or very free adaptation, of the *Aeneid* became, as we have seen, an

object of scorn to Gavin Douglas. Caxton's other translations include *The Knight of the Town*, *Reynard the Fox*, *The Four Sons of Aymon*, and *The History of Godfrey of Boulogne*. Through his choice of subjects he certainly did much to perpetuate the taste for romances, though it is significant of the times that he rejects the waning type written in alliterative verse for the more fashionable variety derived from French prose. His style, which appears most distinctively in the very instructive prefaces to his different publications, alternates curiously between the natural simplicity of the language at this period, and the ornateness by which, quite consciously and explicitly, he strove to give that language dignity. If his prose has seldom the beauty so constant in Malory, its more direct passages are admirably vigorous; and its occasional defects of involution and cumbrousness are those of one striving toward a richer and nobler structure.

Berners.

The same ornateness, due to the same striving, is evident in certain works of another great translator, John Bourchier, Lord Berners (1467–1533); but Berners' prose at its best has a tact and music beyond Caxton's compass. His finest and longest and most famous work is his translation of the *Chronicles* of Froissart, which was issued from Pynson's press between 1523 and 1525. Berners, who had been bred in Froissart's school of action and chivalry, set about his work with enthusiasm, and did full justice to his incomparable model. His version is full of vigour and charm, and reproduces Froissart's forthright vividness, without undue 'aureation' or embellishment. It showed Englishmen what the French had already done in the way of heightened historical narrative, and what they might do themselves; and in its general scope and method, if not in the details of its style, it became a valued model for the Elizabethan chroniclers. Among Berners' remaining translations are two from the French, *Arthur of Little Britain* and *Huon of Bordeaux*. In the first of these he is handicapped by the crudity of his original. *Huon*, however, in its successive versions, had for long been one of the most popular romances in French, and despite its digressions and weakness of construction, it may still be read with pleasure in Berners' spirited English. His two remaining translations were made from French versions of Spanish originals: the first is Guevara's *Golden Book of Marcus Aurelius*, subsequently Englished by North under the title of *The Diall of Princes*; the second is *The Castle of Love*, a romance of chivalry. Both of these in their original dress have the peculiar ornateness and artificiality which, through North and Lyly, subsequently became acclimatised in England under the name of Euphuism. Berners reproduces these qualities in his translation, and thus becomes in a sense Lyly's forerunner as a craftsman in the ornate style. Some have claimed that his general use of the ornate was not due to his natural bent or inclination, but merely to the accident which flung Guevara in his way; yet his prefaces to



Froissart and *Arthur*, written before he had felt Guevara's influence, are highly elaborated; and he seems to have had a natural tendency toward 'aureation', which was inhibited in his earlier translations only by the comparative lack of it in his originals. In all its aspects his style is typical of the effort and tendency of his period.

In literature the Middle Age was one of tradition and borrowing. Originality was not, as now, considered essential to greatness; and translators might become important after a fashion unknown to ourselves. Among them has sometimes been reckoned the author of that consummate prose romance, *Morte d'Arthur*, issued by Caxton from his press in 1485, but completed fifteen years earlier. 'Sir Thomas Malory, Knight', to whom Caxton attributes the work, was, however, far more than a mere translator, or even a mere compiler. Even in his drawings on French sources, such as *Merlin*, he is a selective artist, taking from them what suits him, and moulding what he takes according to his own fine sense of fitness and beauty. In many cases he reduces what he finds, in others he adds matter of his own, and here again, as in his blending of his divers sources, high artistry is evident. He shows the same free and individual handling when drawing not on a French but on an English source, as in his Fifth Book, where his original is that fine rhyming romance, *Morte d'Arthur*. His genius consists not in the invention of new plots or characters, but in the imposition of superb form upon existing matter. It is no more necessary to base his claim to originality on the fact that no 'source' has so far been discovered for his tale of Beaumains and the damsel than it would be necessary to base a similar claim in Shakespeare's case on a similar uncertainty regarding *Love's Labour's Lost*. Nor is it reasonable to judge the construction of the *Morte d'Arthur* by the strict and narrow canons which might be applicable to the modern 'well-made play' or short story. For all its surface inconsistencies, it has a profound spiritual unity, and if Malory is not an impeccable artisan, he remains in all essentials a consummate artist and genius. It was fitting that the Arthurian legend, which had been begotten in England, should reach its highest expression in this great English work. In its pages we meet Arthur, as yet a true king and a warlike, of whom Tristram could say 'Ye know not my lord Arthur, for all knights may learn to be a knight of him': here too, are the four lovers, 'the only ones that be within this land, that is Sir Launcelot du Lake and Queen Guenever, and Sir Tristram de Lionnes and Queen Isoud'; here are Isoud herself who 'died swooning upon the corse of Sir Tristram, whereof was great pity': all the knights of the Table Round sung by later poets: others, like the dauntless and tragic Sir Palomides, to whom no poet has yet given his just due:<sup>1</sup> and others again like Sir Ozanna le Cure Hardy,

<sup>1</sup> Though he enters, of course, into *Tristram of Lyonesse* and *The Defence of Guinevere*.

Sir Griflet le Fils de Dieu, and Sir Selises of the Dolorous Tower, whose very names are romance. As for the story, it may be asked whether any tale in the world has surpassed its greatest moments: the last parting, for instance, of Launcelot and Guenever, or that other parting in which 'Arthur commanded to cast his sword Excalibur into the water and was delivered to ladies in a barge'.

The spirit of the book, which is the spirit of all chivalry and trust and faith, is best given in certain of its sayings: 'Why, said La Beale Isoud, are ye a knight and be no lover? It is shame to you: wherefore ye may not be called a good knight, but if ye make quarrel for a lady.'—'Sir Launcelot is come but of the eighth degree from our Lord Jesu Christ, and Sir Galahad is of the ninth degree from our Lord Jesu Christ, therefore I dare say they be the greatest gentlemen of the world.'—'This day, said Sir Palomides, I did full uncourteously unto Sir Launcelot, and full unknighly, and full knightly and courteously he did to me again: for an he had been as ungentle to me as I was to him, this day I had won no worship: and therefore, said Palomides, I shall be Sir Launcelot's knight while my life lasteth.'—'Now reek I not though I die, for now I hold me one of the blessed maidens of the world which hath made the worthiest knight of the world.'

These passages illustrate not only the noble and passionate spirit of the *Morte d'Arthur*, but its not less passionate beauty of language. Simple, sensuous and exquisite, Malory's best prose cannot be anatomized, nor ticketed with any label of criticism. Its spell is best felt in the sentences just quoted, and in these: 'And then he began to tremble right hard when the deadly flesh began to behold the spiritual things.'—'In May when every lusty heart flourisheth and bourgeoneth.'—'God give him joy that this spear made, for there came never a better in my hand.'—'But she had taken such cold for the default of help that deep draughts of death took her, that needs she must die and depart out of this world, there was none other bote.'—'But Sir Launcelot rode overthwart and endlong in a wild forest, and held no path but as wild adventure led him.'—'So the Bishop departed and did the cursing in the most orgulist wise that might be done.'

## CHAPTER X

### BARCLAY AND SKELTON

It has been shown in a previous chapter that the English poets from Lydgate to Hawes owe much to Chaucer, and, through him, to the *Romaunt of the Rose*, and the French tradition of allegory. French influence was also strong in the early writings of Alexander Barclay (1475 ?–1552), most notably in his translation of Gringoire's *Chateau de Labeur*.



But it was from Germany that he took the conception of his most important work, *The Ship of Fools* (1509), which is a translation or free adaptation of Sebastian Brant's *Narrenschiff* (1494). Brant had tried to make his readers morally better by producing in them a sense of amused superiority to the vices of their neighbours. Such a feeling being comfortable and human, his book had a vast popularity on the Continent, and was translated into Latin and thence into the chief European languages. In his brief prefatory note, Barclay states that he has drawn on the 'Laten, Frenche and Doche' (German) versions for his own rendering. In the passage dealing with 'unprofitable study' he admits that

Barclay—  
*The Ship  
of Fools.*

the enormity  
Of our students and their obstinate error  
Caused me to write two sentences or three  
More than I find written in my author.

In point of fact, Barclay's translation is two and a half times the length of his Latin original, and amounts to over fourteen thousand lines.<sup>1</sup> He himself was apprehensive that he might 'halt in metre and err in eloquence'; and we shall do him small injustice if we admit that he does both these things. He has not the wit, or, failing wit, the nervous incisive speech, of the true satirist; and his pictures of fools and their folly are imperfectly individualized, and tend always to the commonplace. It is only occasionally that his language attains even such terseness as this:

Say, foolish father, hadst thou lieber see  
Thy sonnes necke unwrested with a rope,  
Than with a rod his skin should broken be ?

Or such quaintness as this :

Ye clerkes that on your shoulders bear the shield  
Unto you granted by the university,  
How dare ye adventure to fight in Christe's field  
Against sinne, without ye clear and guiltless be ?  
Consider the Cock, and in him shall ye see  
A great example, for with his winges thrice  
He beateth himself to wake his own body  
Before he crow, to cause others wake or rise.

The ballade octave used in this passage is reserved by Barclay for the envoys he appends to his description of each class of fools: the descriptions themselves are in rime royal. A welcome alleviation for the reader is provided by the quaint and vivid woodcuts which Barclay took over from his German original.<sup>2</sup>

The *Ship of Fools* had considerable influence upon the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Arthur Koelbing, *Cambridge History of English Literature*, Chapter IV.

<sup>2</sup> These are reproduced in Jamieson's fine two-volume edition of the poem (Paterson, Edinburgh: 1874).

literature which immediately followed it, notably upon *Cocke Lorell's Bote*, an amusing and strongly individual satire upon London tradesmen and their wives. Barclay's other chief work, his *Eclogues*, gives him the distinction of being the first writer of pastorals in English, and apart from such positive value as the poems possess, this distinction is no mean one, when we consider the subsequent history of the form in English. The *Eclogues*, in which Menalcas, Coridon, and Amyntas jostle with such wholly un-Sicilian shepherds as Codrus and Faustus, are free paraphrases of originals by Mantuan and Aeneas Sylvius, with copious additions of Barclay's own. Classical scholars who come to them seeking the exquisiteness of Theocritus will be woefully disappointed; but they contain some interesting satire on the manners of the time: and the combination of this with the pastoral convention foreshadows the *Shepherd's Calendar*.

Barclay's  
*Eclogues*.

Skelton.

If the *Ship of Fools* lacks vitality, there is no such lack in the best work of John Skelton (1460 ?–1529), which falls into a number of different kinds. His *Garland of Laurel* is in form a fifteenth-century allegory of the familiar type; it is written largely in his own praise, and commemorates the presentation to him of a laurel crown by the Countess of Surrey and her ladies. A much more successful allegory is *The Bowge of Court*, a satire in rime royal on the uncertainty and danger of court favour. The personages of this poem—Favell, Dissimulation, Suspicion, and others—are not mere abstractions, but living personalities drawn with considerable vividness and force. In these poems Skelton continues the Chaucerian tradition; but his other chief allegorical work, *Magnificence*, owes little if anything to Chaucer, being a Morality Play, and a particularly fine one.<sup>1</sup> Two further plays of his, now lost, but mentioned in the *Garland of Laurel*, are *The Interlude of Virtue* and *Achademios*.

Skelton, who was a parson, if a very unconventional one, has left several hymns and metrical meditations and prayers; but neither these nor his poems, erotic or ironical, on women contain his most characteristic work, which must be sought in his satires, personal, social, and political. The greater number of these are written in the verse to which he has given his name, the 'Skeltonic', which consists of iambic or anapaestic lines, containing two stresses only, and rhymed together in continuous succession twice, thrice, four times, or even more frequently. Obviously this metre forbids the highest flights of poetry, and can easily sink to the very lowest; but as handled by Skelton, it develops a certain doggerel speed and devilry, which fit it for the homely invective or description of his choice, and even for the elfin fancy by which he is sometimes seized. The most notorious of his poems in this metre is *The Tunning of Eleanor Rumming*, which describes the drunken

<sup>1</sup> It receives separate notice in the chapter on the Early Drama.





*Phillip Sparrow*, on the dead pet of Mistress Joan Scroupe, of the nunnery of Carrow.

Character-  
istics of  
Skelton.

It is easy to scoff at Skelton and very difficult to like him wholeheartedly. To many his 'Skeltonics' are irritating and suggest an experiment of the nursery. It is not merely that they are slipshod, for slipshodness is often an effect of art, and goes well with a certain kind of satire: it is that their jingle is constantly obvious and monotonous. It is only Skelton's superb vitality which saves them and him from utter downfall; and for that vitality he must be given every credit, since it enabled him to break away from many outworn fifteenth-century conventions of form and subject. In this credit his 'Skeltonics' must share, since they certainly make for metrical freedom. But for all his originality, and for all the love of learning which gives him contact with the new forces, Skelton holds in nearly all essentials of the Middle Ages, as this brief account of him may serve to show.

## CHAPTER XI

### EARLY ENGLISH DRAMA

The Beginnings — The Miracle Play — The Morality Play — Court Influence — School plays — The Interlude — Early Comedies and Tragedies — The influence of Plautus, Terence, and Seneca.

Early  
Continental  
Drama.

Up to the time of the Norman Conquest England was in the unusual position of having a flourishing prose and poetry, but no poetic or secular drama of any kind. For many centuries, indeed, the drama had been neglected and flouted all the world over, and had become the *femme incomprise* among the literary kinds. In the fifth and sixth centuries the Roman drama, already for long in its decadence, had finally become extinct as a national form, beneath the pressure of the Northern barbarian and the Christian ascetic. A feeble spark of it was smuggled through the centuries by those despised 'firebringers', the *mimi*, who were forced by necessity to juggle and to tumble, to walk ropes and to lead bears for a living, yet kept alive in their *aubes* and *pastourelles*, dialogue, which is the first condition of drama, and in their puppet-shows, plot, which is the second.

On the continent of Europe their influence may be traced through the *tençon* and the *débat*, on to such well-defined dramatic forms as the fifteenth-century farce and morality. Their connexion with the main stream of English drama is less direct, though after the Conquest they played a great part in the life of England, kept the element of farce alive, and prepared the way for the dramatist by making the nation feel the spiritual necessity for some kind of animated entertainment.



The charming *Jeu de Robin et de Marion*, for which they are responsible, passes, by a happy, if erroneous, popular identification, into the early English Robin Hood plays, which are carried on in more than one Elizabethan drama.

The attempt to hail the Teutonic *scop*, or minstrel, as a forerunner of English drama, is a forlorn hope, though one which has been occasionally attempted by the *enfants perdus* of criticism. Much more reasonable is the citation in this connexion of the village festival and the folk play. The May Game, the mediaeval Sword Dance, and the Hock Tide Festival, are all accompanied with drama, springing out of the very heart of the people. In a favourite variety of this, the peasant's elemental tragedy takes form in a scene representing the death of Summer, followed, generally within the same drama, by a scene of joyous comedy embodying the re-birth of Spring. To this kind belongs the 'pretty little May-day drama' performed at Briançon in Dauphiné, 'in which the leaf-clad man falls into sleep upon the ground and is awakened by the kiss of a maiden'.<sup>1</sup> Directly from the folk, too, come the Morris Dance, with its clown and hobby-horse, and the Mummings' Play, or St. George's Play, with its Knight and Dragon, and strange cast of attendant characters, 'King Alfred and his bride, King Cole, King William, Giant Blunderbore, Little Jack, and a Morris Dance Fool'.

All of these forms had a contributory influence on English drama, and some of them—notably the farce—affect its later history directly and powerfully; but the well-spring must be sought elsewhere. It is an irony of history that the Church, which banned and slew the old drama, should have tenderly fostered the new, should have founded English tragedy, and, despite herself, should have forwarded modern comedy and even ribald farce. To this last kind she contributed the *Tripudium*, or noisy revelry of the Feast of Fools, and the celebration of the Boy Bishop. These festivals consisted of travesties made respectively by the lower dignitaries of the Church and by the choir-boys, of the functions performed at Mass by the higher Church dignitaries. They degenerated into horseplay, often performed within the Church itself; but the farces to which they gave rise attach themselves to the purely secular farces, and thus help to carry on the dramatic tradition.

Church  
Drama.

But the greatest gift of the early Church to English dramatic literature was tragic, and concerned with the greatest Tragedy of all. Already in the sixth century the development of dialogue in Church ritual had received a remarkable impetus through the practice of trope-writing, or the contribution of texts written for the *neumae* or melodies inserted in amplification of the antiphones sung at Mass. This resulted in a free development of alternating song, and to this sacred dialogue

Christmas  
and Easter  
Plays.

<sup>1</sup> E. K. Chambers, *The Mediaeval Stage*, vol. i, p. 187.

were shortly added sacred action and plot. In the *Concordia Regularis Monachorum* (967 ?), a manual of Church ritual for use in monasteries, occurs what has been called 'the oldest extant example in European literature of the theatrical recital of an alternating song in church'.<sup>1</sup> This performance is, indeed, more than a recital: it is a solemn Easter drama, centring round the sepulchre of Christ. On an erection symbolizing this, one of the brethren takes his seat, in the likeness of an angel. To him approach three other brethren clad in copes, and swinging thuribles with incense, who counterfeited the women with spices coming to anoint the body of Jesus. The angel, on seeing them, begins 'in a dulcet voice of medium pitch' to sing '*Quem Quaeritis?*' ('Whom seek ye?'). The three reply, '*Jhesum Nazarenum*' ('Jesus of Nazareth'). The angel replies that He has arisen even as He foretold. The three turn joyfully to the choir and sing '*Alleluia, surrexit Dominus*' ('Alleluia, the Lord hath risen'). Then the angel summons them to the sepulchre with the anthem, '*Venite et videte locum*' ('Come ye and see the place'). 'And saying this,' continues the direction, 'let him rise and lift the veil, and show them the place bare of the Cross, but only the clothes laid there in which the Cross was to be wrapped.'<sup>2</sup>

It is obvious that this piece of ritual already includes every essential of drama. As time went on this Easter play received further development: at Sarum, in the fourteenth century, it included the race run to the tomb by Peter and John, but long before this<sup>3</sup> a separate sacred drama, the *Officium Pastorum*, had risen out of the antiphonal chants employed at the celebration of Christmas. In this the angel reappears, and the shepherds take the place of the adoring women. This play centres round the crib of Christ, just as the Easter play had centred round the sepulchre. Gradually additions were made to the Christmas play, as they had been made to the Easter play, and from this principle of extension grew the great cycles of religious drama, which eventually covered the whole of Gospel history from the Creation onwards, with an extension, in many cases, to the Day of Doom. Each of these plays, of which there might be some fifty or more in one cycle, dealt with a separate episode of the sacred narrative. Single plays on sacred subjects were written in order to be acted by the children in monastery schools, and this practice was carried with notable effect into the period of Shakespeare. Plays of this kind were written by Hilarius, a ribald pupil of Abelard, in the first quarter of the twelfth century.

In England the sacred drama was mainly confined to the incidents of the Gospel, with additions from the Apocrypha,

<sup>1</sup> Professor W. Creizenach, *Cambridge History of English Literature*, vol. v, Chap. III.

<sup>2</sup> Chambers, vol. ii, Chap. XVIII.

<sup>3</sup> Creizenach shows that a Christmas play was performed at Salisbury in 1222.



and mediaeval sacred tradition. Plays dealing with the lives of saints are rare in England: on the Continent they were common, and were known as 'miracle' plays, in contradistinction to the 'mystery' plays dealing with the Gospel narrative. This distinction did not prevail in England, where the term 'miracle play' was early applied to sacred plays of every type. The term 'mystery play', as far as English drama is concerned, is 'a literary coinage of later times'.<sup>1</sup>

Miracle  
Plays.

As the sacred play grew in vogue and volume, and demanded fresh scenes and properties, it became impossible to accommodate either it or its increasing audience within the church, and early in the thirteenth century we find mention of a performance in an English churchyard. From the yard it was only a step to the street, or to such open places as those in which many sacred plays (e. g. the Adam Play, and the Donaueschingen Passion Play) were produced on the Continent. A further step, and a most important one, was taken when the vernacular was substituted for Latin, and the folk of the street were thus enabled to follow the dialogue as well as the action. The earlier stage of the drama's emancipation was complete when the control of the productions passed from religious into secular hands.

It is obvious that each of these steps represents progress not only in the popularization of the plays, but in the possibility of dramatic handling. Scenes of comedy could now be introduced, for the first time, into the solemn and even tragic setting of the early liturgical dramas. It was, indeed, true, as has been already shown, that a good deal of rollicking horseplay had taken place, even within the church walls, at the Feast of Fools and similar festivities; but this had been discouraged by such Papal prohibitions as that of Innocent III (1207); and within the liturgical plays themselves there could be little development in this direction till the drama had won free of the Church and church control, and was performed in the English tongue. As soon as these conditions were fulfilled, a remarkable development appears, and free scope is given to the popular taste for bustling fun. Such a tendency was naturally in abeyance during the supreme moments of Gospel narrative, when the Deity Himself was present; but when the scene shifted, and was left free to humankind, the tension was relaxed, often with startling suddenness. Thus, in the York Cycle the plays dealing with the Creation, the Temptation, and the Fall have considerable dignity and dramatic power. Lucifer, in particular, has much of the poignancy which is to reappear in the Mephistophilis of Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus*. But when we pass to Cain and Abel, there is horseplay at once: Cain is provided with a comic servant who calls him 'Mr. Cain' and trips over his own feet, like a modern pantomime clown. Similarly, Noah and his wife have a comic altercation over the

Comic  
Elements  
in the  
Sacred  
Plays.

<sup>1</sup> F. E. Schelling, *Elizabethan Drama*, vol. i, p. 11.

projected voyage in the Ark : she complains that she cannot possibly get her packing done in time, and boxes his ears soundly when he tries to hurry her. Some of these scenes were even introduced into dramas containing the Sacred Presence : thus in the Second Shepherd's Play of the Towneley Cycle, there is introduced into a scene representing the birth of Christ, a border sheep-stealer, a highly amusing character bearing the significant name of Mak. It is characteristic of the mediæval mind that it was equally unshocked by the anachronism and by the buffoonery, and that the latter did not in the least weaken its sense of reverence for the Gospel mysteries.

Staging of  
Miracle  
Plays.

On the continent of Europe mystery and miracle plays were, for the most part, performed on a stationary stage situated in some open place or square : in England the performances were, to a large extent, conditioned by the ritual of the Corpus Christi festival, to which, after its institution in 1264, they became attached with a closeness unparalleled in any part of the Continent. This festival's processional nature was largely responsible for the procession of 'pageants', or movable platforms, on which the sacred dramas were now produced. Each pageant, with the play performed on it, was controlled by one of the trade crafts or guilds, which had been originally responsible for the groupings or tableaux associated with the festival. The pageants, which were drawn by horses and preceded by outriders, moved from 'station' to 'station' throughout the streets, and on arriving at each of these produced their own plays in rotation : so that if a man cared to remain at the same station throughout the day, he could witness the whole course of Gospel history. We are told that at Chester, at a somewhat later date, the pageants were of two storeys, and that the actors dressed in the lower and played in the upper of these. Guilds tended to choose dramas for whose production they were naturally qualified : thus the shipwrights dealt with the building of the Ark, the carpenters with the construction of the Cross, and the dyers with the play in which Christ appears before the gorgeously arrayed Herod. The performers, though they were paid for their appearances, were amateurs in the sense that their means of living were not derived from the drama, and that they only appeared at stated seasons of the year. The plays were full of oddities and anachronisms : thus, Isaac swears by the Blessed Trinity, Herod by Mahomed : Lucifer is represented as a 'fine serpent made with a virgin face and yellow hair upon her head'. Hell-mouth is represented as 'the head of a whale worked by two men, out of which devil boys ran'. On another occasion we find it provided with 'fire, a windlass, and a barrel for the earthquake'.

Types of  
Miracle  
Play.

The three main cycles of English miracle plays which remain to us entire, or nearly entire, are those of York, Wakefield (The Towneley cycle), and Chester. Other plays which have come down to us indicate the existence of cycles at Coventry, Newcastle upon Tyne, and Norwich. In the early part of the sixteenth



century, single miracle plays began to be written by distinct authors. Thus; John Bale's *God's Promises* (circa 1538) was a polemical mystery play written in the Protestant interest. More interesting is the treatment given to sacred subjects by George Buchanan (1506–1582) in his Latin plays, *Jephthes* and *Baptistes*. For the first time in Northern Europe the sacred play was humanized and rendered artistic by recourse to the Senecan and Euripidean model. Other Latin plays on sacred subjects were written by Ralph Radcliffe (1519–1559) and Nicholas Grimald (1519–1562). The single miracle play of specified authorship holds its own till nearly the end of the sixteenth century with such dramas as *A Looking Glass for London and England* (1589?)—though this also possesses marked morality elements—by Lodge and Greene; and George Peele's *David and Bethsabe* (1589). By this time the miracle cycles, which had reached their flowering time in the fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries, had almost disappeared,<sup>1</sup> partly through the strenuous opposition of Protestantism, partly owing to the vast new sources of dramatic material opened up by the New Learning.

Before dealing with these newer developments, we must glance back again to an earlier stage of the drama and a distinct dramatic form. As early as the fourth century A.D., in *Psychomachia*, the allegorical epic of Prudentius, the different vices and virtues had been personified as warriors battling for the soul of man. In *Antichristus*, a Latin play of the twelfth century, similar characters (e. g. Hypocrisis and Misericordia) are again personified and given a dramatic setting. From some such origins as these, and possibly from the strange imagery of the 'Danse Macabre' or Dance of Death, sprang that variety of drama known as the Morality. Here the *dramatis personae*, for the most part, are not sacred personages, but abstractions of the kind just indicated. The most usual theme of the Moralities was the conflict between Vice and Virtue for the human soul. In *The Castle of Perseverance* (1460?) man figures as 'Humanum Genus', and, aided by certain allegorical virtues, defends the Castle against the powers of evil. In the lost *Paternoster* play he appears as Vicious, and runs the gauntlet of the Seven Deadly Sins. In *Mundus et Infans*, he is the child waxing to manhood and old age amid the world's manifold temptations. In the impressive *Everyman* (circa 1500), the finest morality extant, he is successively deserted on his perilous journey with Death to God by all his earthly attributes save Good Deeds, who, at last, with the help of Knowledge, brings him to salvation. *Mary Magdalene* (circa 1485) is partly a Miracle or saint's play, partly a Morality. It contains many scenes of Gospel narrative, but these are diversified by the introduction of Wrath, Sensuality,

Morality  
Plays.

<sup>1</sup> At Coventry, Corpus Christi plays were produced up till 1575 or thereabouts. Creizenach shows that at Kendal they were kept up as late as the reign of James I.

and other abstractions, besides the devils Belphegor and Beelzebub. Skelton's *Magnificence* is an allegory directed against prodigal expenditure on unworthy friends. The later Moralities passing into the Interlude type were often devoted to educational ends, as in the very remarkable *Interlude of the Nature of the Four Elements*, by John Rastell: others were used for the purpose of religious or political polemics. This kind was especially forbidden by Elizabeth at the beginning of her reign. For this reason, and for the causes which had proved fatal to the Miracle play, the Morality soon became unfashionable.

Character-  
istics of the  
Morality.

Its artistic limitations are obvious. It was first and foremost didactic in tendency, and the abstractions on which it depended were hardly the most promising stuff for the creation of a human interest. On the other hand, it has been remarked that the maker of Moralities was not fettered by tradition, as had been the playwrights who preceded him. He could give free rein to his inventive power, and as the Morality appealed primarily to the mind, whereas the Miracle play had appealed to the eye, he could command something of the dramatic interest now attaching to the 'problem-play'. From the Morality, moreover, sprang that curious character known as the Vice who wrought mischief on all and sundry with his dagger of lath, and had the attributes both of devil and buffoon. Many consider this character to be the prototype of the Shakespearean Fool. This part was played by a professional actor, and becomes readily distinguishable in the Moralities and the later Interludes.

The Inter-  
lude.

It has been already seen that whereas both Miracles and Moralities contained scenes of comedy, such treatment was greatly limited by their respective religious and didactic purposes. Towards the end of the fifteenth century, a freer type of drama became fashionable, especially amongst the aristocratic class. This kind, though it often handled the same theme as the Morality, and might take some educational or political idea as its starting-point, had nearly always amusement for its main end. It is generally known as the Interlude, though the Elizabethans used the word for any kind of short play just as they used the word sonnet for any short poem. The playwright who above all others helped the Interlude to a free development was John Heywood (1497-1577). He was attached to the court of Henry VIII, and there produced a succession of brisk and farcical comedies for the pleasure-loving king, who had grown considerably bored with the earlier Morality. The plays traditionally attributed to Heywood may be taken as representing a direct break with the Morality, and a recurrence to the rollicking French 'farce' or 'sottie'. Several of them are extant: two of the best are *The Play of the Weather*, and *The Four P. P.*<sup>1</sup> The former deals with the comically con-

<sup>1</sup> This play, though traditionally attributed to Heywood, has been recently assigned to Cornish.



ficting requests made to Jupiter by folk of various callings for the weather that suits them best: the second is a dramatic satire, racy, free, and Chaucerian in spirit, in which four characters, the palmer, the pedlar, the potycary, and the pardoner, vie for pre-eminence in the delicate art of lying.

The dramatic career of Heywood illustrates the great and growing influence exerted by the Court on the history of English drama. It was largely owing to the love of the Tudor monarchs for amusement that dramatic art was enabled to shake itself free of irksome restrictions and to develop according to its own impelling spirit. The Court drama has been traced as far back as the reign of Richard II; but it first becomes important under the Tudors, who contributed to the national dramatic progress in two important ways—through the elaborately staged mummings and disguisings in which they themselves participated, and which eventually helped the public drama towards a considerable improvement in staging; and through the plays which were acted for their edification by the choir children of the Chapel Royal and St. George's Chapel, Windsor. These plays were both written and staged by the royal choir-masters, one or two of whom, notably Heywood, Edwards, and Hunnis, were evidently men of genius. From an early period the amusements of the Court had been under the direction of a special department known as the Office of the Revels: in the reign of Henry VIII a Master of the Revels was appointed, who eventually became not only a producer of Court plays, but a licenser of public plays. This official is important inasmuch as it was he who acted as medium between the Court and the public stage during the period when both institutions were at their highest pitch of glory.

It may be noted here that the performances by boy actors were by no means confined to the children of the Court. During Henry VIII's reign, the boys of Eton and St. Paul's performed both Latin and English plays in his presence. In Elizabeth's reign the practice was extended to the Merchant Taylors' School, the King's School, Canterbury, and many other schools in London and the provinces. Here, as at the Court, the plays acted by the boys were commonly written by their head-masters. In many cases the performances were isolated and occasional; but certain head-masters—for example, Nicholas Udall, successively head of Eton and Westminster—became habitual and almost professional playwrights, while certain of the boy companies—those, for instance, of the Chapel Royal and St. Paul's—achieve full professional status and eventually move from the singing school into theatres of their own. These are to become rivals of Shakespeare and his adult fellow actors, and are glanced at in a notable passage of *Hamlet*, where reference is made to the official prohibitions which eventually led to their disappearance.

The Interlude, as we have seen, represents an artistic advance on what had gone before, inasmuch as it shows the comic spirit

Drama  
and the  
Court.

School  
Drama.

striving, however unsuccessfully, to free itself from didactic motives. Some<sup>1</sup> have endeavoured to trace it as a separate form throughout the later Tudor period; but just as in its beginnings it is often indistinguishable from the freer kind of Morality (as in the *Merry Interlude entitled Respublica*, 1553), so in its later developments it merges into the new comedy and tragi-comedy, with frequent reversions to the didactic or polemical type.

Classical  
Influence  
—Comedy

Further development of a most notable kind was given to English drama at this period by the Classical revival. Terence had been the favourite Roman comic playwright of the Middle Ages, but a keen interest in Plautus was created by the recovery of his twelve lost plays in 1427. Henceforth he eclipsed Terence in popularity, though both playwrights were still staged in the original Latin, and both subsequently influenced the vernacular drama in England and throughout a great part of Europe. More in his *Utopia* (1516) alludes to the frequency of Plautine representations. In 1520, 'a goodly comedy of Plautus' was played in the presence of Henry VIII and the French hostages. In 1527 the *Menaechmi* was performed by the boys of St. Paul's before Wolsey. Later, both Terence and Plautus in the original were played before Queen Elizabeth by the boys of Westminster School, and similar performances were given at the Merchant Taylors' School and other schools throughout the kingdom.

Early  
English  
Comedies.

A further step towards popularizing and nationalizing the classical models was taken in 1530, in the translation of Terence's *Andria*, entitled *Terens in English*. In the final phase, playwrights are writing after the pattern of Roman comedy, but in the tongue and spirit of their own nation. The beginnings of this tendency are to be seen in the vigorous English farce of *Thersites* (1537), where the Latin original, though ultimately classical, is actually that of the mediaeval humanist, Ravisius Textor. The direct Plautine influence is evident in three of the earliest and best-known English comedies, *Ralph Roister Doister* (1553), *Gammer Gurton's Needle* (1552-3), and *Jacke Jugeler* (published in 1562-3, but probably composed some years earlier). The first of these is by Nicholas Udall, and the third has recently been ascribed to the same author.<sup>2</sup> *Ralph Roister Doister* is modelled on the *Miles Gloriosus* of Plautus, with hints from the *Eunuchus* of Terence. Roister Doister, the swaggering soldier, and his parasite, Matthew Merygreeke, represent two stock types of Roman comedy. Ralph lays siege to the heart of Christian Custance, a virtuous and sprightly matron whose affianced lover is away on his travels. Mistress Custance fools him to the top of his bent, even as Mistress Ford was subsequently to fool Falstaff. The play closes with the discomfiture of the braggart, and the loving reconciliation of the temporarily estranged couple.

<sup>1</sup> e. g. C. F. Tucker Brooke, *The Tudor Drama*, Chaps. III and IV.

<sup>2</sup> *Jacke Jugeler*, Introduction by W. H. Williams.



*Roister Doister*, apart from its intrinsic merit, is a landmark in the evolution of English comedy, embodying as it does the form and symmetry derived from the old models. Yet the Roman and English elements which it so enterprisingly brings together, remain easily distinguishable in the fabric of the plot. In *Gammer Gurton's Needle*, by William Stevenson, the fusion is complete. Suggested by classical originals, this coarse and racy comedy of village life is English to the core. In it, the Gammer loses her needle, and turns the whole village topsy-turvy to find it, till it is at last discovered sticking in the breeches of her servant Hodge, which she had been mending. This simple plot is complicated by the intrigues of the roguish mischief-maker, Diccon the Bedlam, and by the humours of Dame Chat, the ale-wife, and the blackguardly parson, Dr. Rat. Few plays in the language have been written with greater gusto and natural devilry than this one, which has a strong claim to be considered the earliest regular English comedy.

English drama at this period is a river steadily swelling beneath the inrush of various tributary streams. A whole class of plays have their origin in the Dutch humanist drama, notably in the *Acolastus* of Gnaphaeus, a play of widespread influence dealing with the Prodigal Son. This theme is handled in several plays which blend elements of the older Morality with those of the revived humanist drama. Chief among these are *Nice Wanton* (1553 ?); *The Disobedient Child* by Thomas Ingelend (1560 ?); the admirable *Misogonus* (1560 ?); *Jacob and Esau* (1558 ?); and *The Glass of Government* (1575) by George Gascoigne. Spanish influence had already made itself felt in *Calisto and Meliboea* (1530 ?), a tragi-comedy adapted from the dramatic novel, *Celestina*, by Fernando de Rojas (1499). This play, though it is defaced by a didactic ending, is in its original intention a tragi-comedy of love, and is remarkable as being the earliest extant specimen of the romantic drama, which was afterwards to become the chief glory of the Elizabethan stage. A more important influence, which had already made itself felt in *Misogonus*, was that of Italian comedy. Gascoigne's *Supposes* (1566) is a fairly literal translation of Ariosto's *Suppositi*, an admirable comedy of intrigue, in which Roman models are adapted to contemporary Italian life. *Supposes* is remarkable as being the first English comedy written in prose. *The Bugbears* (published in 1561) is an adaptation of Grazzini's *La Spiritata*. Its title has reference to the device of Formosus, who, for purposes of his own gain, persuades his miserly father, Amadeus, that his house is haunted by 'bugbears', or spirits. These plays show how largely the Italian influence was responsible for the growing mastery of complicated plot which the English dramatist was gradually developing. They belong respectively to the Court and the University. Less artistic plays of Italian origin held the popular stage at this period, while Italian actors performed

Continen-  
tal Influ-  
ence.

at the Tudor Court, and in 1578 accompanied Elizabeth on her royal progress.

The  
Native  
Element.

These foreign influences, for all their strength and importance, did not inhibit the native element in English drama, which is seen strongly at work in the gay, as well as in the grave and moving, scenes of Richard Edwards's admirable tragi-comedy, *Damon and Pithias* (1564). Edwards, like William Hunnis (author of *Narcissus* [1572]), was Master of the Chapel Royal, and the numerous plays accredited to this pair, and other holders of the position, once more illustrate the immensely important part played by the Court in the evolution of English drama.<sup>1</sup> More romantic in its theme than the foregoing dramas, and more popular in its appeal, is *Promos and Cassandra* (printed 1578), which possesses racy comic interludes, and has been well described<sup>2</sup> as 'the most typical example of an original romantic play before the period of Shakespeare's immediate predecessors'.

Origins of  
English  
Tragedy.

We must now glance back to the origins of English tragedy. In its early stages this fuses so constantly with comedy, and even with low comedy, that it becomes difficult to distinguish between the two kinds. The primary motive of the Miracle play was, however, one of the most solemn tragedy, and the tragic motive predominates throughout the history of the sacred cycles. Despite their manifold crudities, these plays were suffused with that passionate romanticism which can only flourish where some kind of great faith prevails. The favourite themes of the Morality and Interlude were neither romantic nor tragic; so that we may regard the Miracle play as having kept alive the tragic feeling throughout the period when it was being threatened by these kinds. But a further influence of a secular kind helped to mould the beginnings of English tragedy. Hero-worship, a prevailing emotion in young communities, had early established a hold upon English literature. It is the moving force in all Anglo-Saxon poetry, inspiring alike the pagan and semi-mythical *Beowulf*, the sacred poems of Cynewulf, and that fine historical lay, *The Battle of Maldon*. In a later age it reappears in the long verse romances which sing the doughty deeds of Guy of Warwick and Huon of Bordeaux. It is the original and inspiring force of the Arthurian legend and the vast literature to which this gave rise. It is one of the main motives of the English ballad, as in *Chevy Chase* and *A Little Lay of Robin Hood*.<sup>3</sup> Its beginnings in drama may be seen in the Robin Hood plays and in the choice of St. George as the hero of the Mummers' Play. The early steps by which this heroic drama developed are obscure, and the obscurity is increased by the fact that none of the very earliest, and very few of the intermediate, plays

<sup>1</sup> For Edwards and the Court Drama generally see C. W. Wallace, *The Evolution of the English Drama up to Shakespeare*.

<sup>2</sup> F. S. Boas, *Cambridge History of English Literature*, vol. v, p. 120.

<sup>3</sup> See Tucker Brooke, *The Tudor Drama*, Chap. VII.



have survived. But two things are certain—first, that they were written for popular audiences, and second, that they were loose and rambling in construction. They turned on the fortunes and doughty deeds of one man, and subordinated to these all other interests of plot or character. Stephen Gosson, the puritanical ex-playwright, writing in 1579, indicates that they had their origin in such romantic tales or poems as *The Palace of Pleasure*, and *Amadis of France*. They were commonly knightly and chivalrous in their setting, as may be seen from two surviving specimens, *Sir Clyomon and Sir Clamydes* and *Common Conditions*, both of which deal with the magical adventures of certain doughty champions in strange lands. There is little to say as to the details of this variety of drama, even were there space to say it here; but it should be noted that it represents a native element holding the public stage, and that it is important since from its combination with the classical element evolves the greatest kind of English tragedy.

This classical influence in English tragedy is in large measure the influence of Seneca making its way into England through the playwrights of the Court, University, School, and Inns of Court. Seneca, playwright, philosopher, millionaire, and tutor of Nero, represents the decadence of classical drama. Instead of terror, pity, and beauty, which had been the main marks of Greek tragedy, he gives his readers—for his plays were not written for the stage—horror and epigram. His dramas abound in gruesome acts or descriptions of violence. His dialogue is artificial, antithetical, and weighted with sententious maxims. Yet, both in dialogue and structure, he displays a certain strength and a certain symmetry which were to prove of value to the Renaissance drama which came under his influence. To Seneca, moreover, must be attributed the division of drama into five acts, and the chorus which makes its appearance in early English tragedy. To him, too, we owe that convenient figure of tragedy, the ghost, and probably also the nurse and the conventional tyrant.<sup>1</sup> As early as the beginning of the fourteenth century translations of Seneca had been published in Italy, and dramas had been written in the vernacular on the Senecan model. His influence on French drama, though later, was equally great, and took shape in the tragedies of Garnier and Jodelle. In England the classical influence was already evident in the themes, and, to some slight extent, in the handling of Richard Edwards's *Damon and Pithias*, John Pickeryng's *Horrestes* (printed 1567), ('R.B.'s) *Appius and Virginia* (1563?), and Thomas Preston's *Cambyses* (written before 1569). But most of these are overweighted by elements of the older Morality; for all their natural vigour they are crude in development and handling, and their comic and tragic elements are unskilfully blended. There is little in them of the true classical model. This was becoming familiar

The Influence of Seneca.

<sup>1</sup> See A. D. Godley, 'Senecan Tragedy', in *English Literature and the Classics* (Clarendon Press).

to English readers and writers through English translations of Seneca's tragedies. Six of these appeared between 1559 and 1566, and in 1581 the whole ten were collected and published in a single volume. It was mainly through these versions, and from the Italian adaptations of Seneca by Ludovico Dolce that the Elizabethan playwright learnt and practised the methods of his Roman forerunner.

*Gorboduc.*

Such methods are strongly evident in the first regular English tragedy, *Gorboduc*. This was written by the lawyer, Thomas Norton, and the famous courtier and poet, Thomas Sackville, and was performed before Queen Elizabeth at the Inner Temple in 1562. It portrays the tragedy of a legendary British king who divides his country between his sons, Ferrex and Porrex, and consequently undergoes a fate similar to that of Lear. Up till the end of the fourth act, the play remains a lurid tragedy, in which the essential characteristics of Senecan drama are interwoven with the native theme. The fifth act, which is a homily addressed to Elizabeth on the evils of an unsettled succession, reverts to the methods of the political Morality. *Gorboduc* is a most important production, not only for the reasons just mentioned, but because it was the first play to discard the old rhyming measures, on which English drama had hitherto depended, for blank verse, which had recently been introduced into England by Surrey in his translation of the *Aeneid*. It is hardly possible to overrate the importance to our literature of this attempt to find an English equivalent for the Senecan *senarius*.

Early  
Senecan  
Tragedies.

Other tragedies on the Senecan model followed, though not at once nor in any great number. *Jocasta* (1566) by Gascoigne and Kinwelmershe, takes its plot from the *Phoenissae* of Euripides, transmitted through the Italian of Dolce. *Tancred and Gismunda* (1568) by Robert Wilmot and others, develops a tale of Boccaccio's in fairly regular Senecan form, and with lavish Senecan transcriptions. *The Misfortunes of Arthur*, by Thomas Hughes and six others, reverts for its theme to the legends of ancient Britain, and to Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*. *Gorboduc* and the three plays just mentioned are academic in their authorship and appeal. The Senecan elements of horror and rhetoric and revenge in the more popular *Selimus* (printed 1594) and *Lochrine* (1586), show that, for good and for bad, the classical influence has spread to the public stage, and has helped to prepare the way for the mightiest period of English drama.

Before we pass to this, and the dramatists who ushered it in, we may glance for a moment at a curious development of the Senecan drama. This consisted of the plays written by Sir Philip Sidney's sister, the Countess of Pembroke, and her coterie, in translation or imitation of the French tragedies, composed on the Senecan model, of Robert Garnier (1534-1590). She herself translated *Antonie*. Thomas Kyd followed with a version of *Cornélie*, and Samuel Daniel produced an



original play, *The Tragedy of Cleopatra*, written after the model set by Garnier. In this class, too, may be reckoned Fulke Greville's *Alaham* and *Mustapha*, which are strictly classical in structure, though not in subject. These plays had little or no influence upon the course of English drama.

## CHAPTER XII

### ELIZABETHAN AND JACOBEAN PROSE

The Beginnings: Fisher to Ascham — Lyly, Sidney, Hooker — The Elizabethan Novel — Literary Criticism — The Chroniclers — The Translators — The Pamphleteers — Satire — Literature of the Sea — Character-writing — Raleigh, Burton, Bacon, Jonson, Selden.

ENGLISH literature, like English life, during the sixteenth century, is moulded by two main influences, the religious reformation and the classical renaissance, and in many phases of the literature now under discussion, these forces are seen operating in unison. At the beginning of the century, the sojourn of Erasmus in England, and the influence of such great English scholars as Grocyn, Colet, and Linacre had deepened the love of the new learning and the new humanism, and had helped to point imaginative minds to fresh worlds of thought and beauty. Everywhere the old canons and formulae were being tested, and either rejected entirely or reinterpreted and amplified. Alike in theology, scholarship, and literature, a richer and wider human conception of life appeared, and after some hesitation and opposition, prevailed. The physician Linacre helped to humanize science by uniting it with the classical learning which he had acquired from the great Greek scholar Leonides. Colet the divine pointed his students away from the dialectical Scotist theology, and even from the broader doctrine of Aquinas, to a more elemental and personal conception of religion. Grocyn the scholar gave to Oxford the new classical lore which he imbibed in Italy from Politian and Chalcondylas. Within the Church, the new learning affected Fisher the reactionary no less powerfully than the reformer Latimer.

The New Learning.

John Fisher, Bishop of Rochester (1459 ?–1553), like his friend and fellow martyr, Thomas More (1478–1535), had been the close friend and protector of Erasmus, who fanned, if he did not kindle, the eager spiritual flame which make both of these Englishmen notable in literature and great in history. With the content of Fisher's sermons we are not here concerned; but their style, with its conscious grace and finish, and deliberate fusion of English and Latin elements, shows how strongly the classical models were at this period affecting the practice of the vernacular.

Fisher.

More's  
*Utopia*.

More's greatest work, *Utopia* (1516), was originally written in Latin, and therefore can be only briefly discussed here. Like Plato's *Republic* and Augustine's *De Civitate Dei*, it is the picture of an ideal commonwealth. The broad humanism of More's character and training manifests itself in his insistence on pacifism, communism, clemency to criminals, kindness to animals, and the elimination of grinding drudgery from the worker's life. The frequent economic and the occasional ethical weaknesses of his treatise are hardly matter for present notice; but its fine sympathy and keen preoccupation with everything that makes for the dignity and worth of life, are typical of all that is best in the new order of thought. Apart from the *Utopia*, More is important in literature through his carefully written controversial writings, his Latin epigrams, and one or two of his interesting but uneven English poems.

Latimer.

The humanism of Hugh Latimer (1485-1555) was directed rather toward deepening and purifying religious faith than toward widening the boundaries of secular knowledge. The honesty and directness which characterized his whole life and brought him a martyr's fate and glory, are everywhere evident in his sermons. These are written in vigorous and simple English, constantly lit up with racy allusion and homely anecdote. In the evolution of the English sermon his style represents a happy interlude between the uncouthness of much that had gone before, and the ornateness of much that was to follow. In his last communications to Ridley and others, as preserved in his *Conferences*, his simple speech becomes poignantly tragic.

Tindale,  
Coverdale,  
Cranmer.

Great importance attaches to three men, William Tindale (1484-1530), Miles Coverdale (1488-1568), and Thomas Cranmer (1489-1556), owing to their connexion with the new English Bible and the English Prayer Book. Tindale's life was a stormy one: throughout the years he spent on the Continent he was persecuted by his enemies, who eventually had him put to death for his religious writings and beliefs. His English translation of the New Testament made from the Latin, Greek, and German versions, found its way into England at first surreptitiously but afterwards with the acquiescence of Henry VIII. Tindale had already translated part of the Old Testament; but it was left to Coverdale to publish a complete English Bible. The first edition of this appeared in 1535, and was based on the Vulgate, two other Latin versions, the German versions of Zwingli and Luther, and Tindale's translation of the New Testament and the Pentateuch. The so-called Matthew Bible (1537) incorporated all Tindale's extant work, making up the remainder from Coverdale's version: though soon superseded, it is important as supplying the basis for later translations, including the great Authorized Version. Tindale was a far better scholar than Coverdale, and the superb rhythm and language of the Authorized Version are ultimately due to his genius. The language of the New Bible was simple and



vigorous, avoiding pedantry yet ensuing dignity, as became a work of popular and national appeal. Cranmer contributed a preface to the second edition of Coverdale's Great Bible (1540), which is therefore known as Cranmer's Bible. Of his remaining work, the larger part was controversial; but his greatest achievement was his rehandling of the Church liturgy, to which he contributed the litany and many of the collects. The Book of Common Prayer, as we have it to-day, owes much to other hands, and shows how widely spread at this period was the capacity for fine prose; but where it achieves its highest majesty and most superb rhythm, there we can certainly trace the genius of Thomas Cranmer.

The influence of Erasmus is as strongly evident in the work of Sir Thomas Elyot (1490 ?-1546) as it had been in that of Sir Thomas More. His interest in medicine, which he probably derived from Linacre, finds expression in *The Castle of Health*: more famous is his *Book of the Governor*, a treatise strongly influenced both by Plato and Xenophon, in which he discusses the ideal state, and the ideal education for one who is to share in its government. The book is chiefly valuable as an expression of the educational ideals of the early Renaissance in England. The course prescribed for the youthful Governor is liberal and humanistic: it includes logic, geography, history, and wide reading in the classics. The Platonic 'gymnastic' is extended to include tennis, though it forbids football.

Elyot.

The *Itinerary* of John Leland (1506-1552) possesses strong antiquarian but small literary interest. More important are three Cambridge scholars and friends, John Cheke (1514-1557), Thomas Wilson (?-1581), and Roger Ascham (1515-1568). Cheke, as Milton tells us in a famous line, 'taught Cambridge and King Edward Greek', as Regius Professor, and did much to encourage English learning, though writing himself chiefly in Latin. Wilson wrote English, and in his *Art of Rhetoric* encouraged others to write it, and to write it simply, without Latinisms, or those new-fangled affectations which he described as 'ink-horn' terms.

Leland,  
Cheke,  
Wilson.

The most notable of the three is Ascham, whose chief works are *The Schoolmaster*, *Toxophilus*, and some interesting Latin letters. *Toxophilus* is a treatise addressed to the Gentlemen and Yeomen of England on the art of shooting with the long bow. Ascham, who took the same interest in this subject that Kipling was subsequently to take in rifle-shooting, complains that archery has gone out of fashion, with lamentable results to the national life. 'If shooting could speak, she would accuse England of unkindness and slothfulness.' His treatise, though technical, is written vividly and with spirit. 'When a man shooteth,' he says, 'the might of his shot lieth in the foremost finger and on the ringman, for the middle finger, which is the longest, like a lubber starteth back, and beareth no weight of the string at all.' He has a delightful half-serious panegyric of the Goose, the patron bird of archers. Some of his senti-

Ascham

ments recall Plato and anticipate Ruskin : ' Nothing is brought to the most comely use which is not handled after the most comely fashion.' ' Nature itself taught men to join always wellfavouredness with profitableness.' ' Virtue itself is nothing else but comeliness.' This high sense of form appears in *The Schoolmaster*, both by way of example and precept. ' Ye know not what a hurt ye do to learning that care not for words but for matter, and so make a divorce between the tongue and the heart.' The book is inspired with that passion for English learning which is later to find expression in such poems as the *Musophilus* of Daniel, and is one of the master-impulses of the Elizabethan age. Ascham's choice of English for his medium anticipates the final victory of the vernacular over Latin. Less absolute, though not less lasting, in its results was his rejection of the ornate style, and his insistence on a simplicity based on a discriminating use of classical models. He is an early and eager champion of classical prosody in English poetry, and anticipates Harvey and Campion in his objection to ' barbarous rhyming'.

Lyly's  
*Euphues*.

Before discussing collectively the various kinds of Elizabethan prose we may conveniently notice three outstanding figures—John Lyly (1554 ?–1606 ?), Philip Sidney (1554–1586), and Richard Hooker (1554–1600). Lyly's plays will be discussed elsewhere: his most famous work in prose consists of two volumes, *Euphues, the Anatomy of Wit* (1579) and *Euphues and his England* (1580), which together form the first regular English novel. In point of content, *Euphues* owes much to Sir Thomas North's *Diall of Princes*, a translation, through the French, of a famous treatise by the Spaniard, Guevara. North had endeavoured to reproduce the heightened style of his original, and had added to it the ornament of alliteration : to him, and to the example of John Pettie, author of *The Petite Palace of Pleasure*, are due many of the formal characteristics usually associated with ' Euphuism'. The first part of the story is laid in Naples, and turns on the rivalry between Euphues and his friend Philautus for the heart of the maiden Lucilla, who jilts Euphues and involves him in a quarrel with Philautus, and in bitter reflections on the inconstancy of women. In *Euphues and his England*, the two friends become reconciled, and pass into England, where they are entertained at Canterbury by the amiable Fidus. Philautus now falls in love with the Lady Camilla, while Euphues looks on and gives seasonable advice. Camilla proving cold, Philautus transfers his affections to another with greater success. Euphues again quarrels with his friend, and eventually, after praising the women of England, leaves that country for the mountainous retirement of Silixedra.

It will be seen that this novel, written by a courtier for the Court, turns largely on an immemorial theme of romance, the conflict between love and friendship. There is little action in the tale, and what there is is not enthralling. But the book is



not only a novel: it is a novel with a purpose—indeed, with several purposes. It discusses many themes of fashionable interest—friendship, dress, women, youthful folly, religion and education. Lyly's remarks on this last subject in *Euphues and his England* are derived from Plutarch through Erasmus. But great as is the historical importance of the book in point of content, it has still greater importance through its style, which seems contrived in conscious reaction against the simplicity preached and practised by Ascham and his school. Simplicity was to Lyly a cardinal vice: he made it his business to 'load every rift with ore'—or failing this, with tinsel. He arranged his sentences after a scheme of the most carefully planned parallelism or antithesis, and heightened this effect by the free use of rhetorical questions and of repetition, alliteration and assonance.<sup>1</sup> He was lavish in his employment of classical allusion, and of pseudo-classical embroidery and invention; but more distinctive still is the fantastic and often startling use of folk-lore, magic and popular 'science' which runs, generally in the form of simile, throughout *Euphues*, and is directed towards giving its periods richness and variety. For this 'unnatural history', Lyly's chief source was Pliny's *Natural History*.

Lyly's achievement is of high importance in the history of English prose. The effect of *Euphues* was immediate and profound, and its style, though satirized by Nash and others, affected in some degree nearly every contemporary writer of prose, and many writers of verse. Shakespeare constantly uses its language and figures, satirically and otherwise.<sup>2</sup> In point of form it prepared the way for Donne and Browne, and indeed for all who have since striven to write rich and individual prose. In subject and spirit it foreshadows Richardson and Sterne; for, as M. Jusserand remarks,<sup>3</sup> 'With *Euphues* commences in England the literature of the drawing-room.'

Sir Philip Sidney (1554–1586), writing literature as an aristocratic amateur, attempted almost as many of its kinds as the typical professional in letters, Drayton. Here we are concerned with his two chief works in prose. His *Apology for Poetry*, composed about 1579, published in 1595, and subsequently reissued as the *Defence of Poesy*, is among the chief critical documents of the time. It was written in reply to Stephen Gosson, a former playwright who had repented of his ways and in *The School of Abuse* (1579) had written an attack on the drama, and on poetry in general. Gosson's basis of attack was largely moral, and this fact accounts for a good deal in the tone of Sidney's reply. He is concerned to prove that in all countries and ages poetry has been respected, and that she

<sup>1</sup> See R. W. Bond's edition of *The Works of John Lyly*, vol. i, pp. 120–7.

<sup>2</sup> See W. R. Rushton, *Shakespeare's Euphuism*; and R. W. Bond, *Works of John Lyly*, vol. i, pp. 165–75.

<sup>3</sup> *The English Novel in the Time of Shakespeare*. See also Walter Raleigh, *The English Novel*, pp. 30–48; George Saintsbury, *The English Novel*, pp. 33–5; and *John Lyly*, by Albert Feuillerat.

has earned respect through her natural dignity and worth. She is the friend both of virtue and learning: yet she is no austere task-mistress: 'Nature never set forth the earth in so rich tapestry as divers poets have done, neither with pleasant rivers, fruitful trees, sweet smelling flowers, nor whatsoever else may make the too much loved earth more lovely.' Poetry is not only beautiful and helpful: she is divine: her sons 'are so beloved of the Gods that everything they write proceeds of a divine fury'. Sidney now passes to an examination of the different poetic kinds, defending most of them, but commenting severely on the young romantic drama of England. In a famous passage he praises the ballad, a form too little appreciated by the learned of his day. 'Certainly I must confess my own barbarousness: I never heard the old song of Percy and Douglas that I found not my heart moved more than with a trumpet: and yet is it sung but by some blind crowder, with no rougher voice than rude style.' Towards the end of his treatise he discusses the respective merits of rhyme and of classical scansion or 'versing'. English, it appears, is 'fit for both sorts'. In attaching importance to quantitative, as distinguished from accentual, scansion, Sidney was undoubtedly influenced by the theories advanced by his friend Harvey, and adopted for a period by the youthful Spenser. The whole tone of Sidney's treatise, and especially his citation of classical precedents and canons, reflects the temper of the Renaissance, and was probably largely due to Italian influence.

Sidney's  
*Arcadia.*

Sidney's other great work in prose, *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*, was begun in 1580 and published in 1590. Written primarily for the pleasure of the great Countess, his sister, it reflects the gallant fancy and high chivalry of its author's nature, and for its pastoral tone and setting owes much to the *Arcadia* (1504) of Sannazaro and the *Diana Enamorada* (1552) of Montemayor. Its relations to Euphuism have been variously estimated: here it can only be said that while its sentences have sometimes a euphuistic ring, they owe their peculiar grace and aroma to a different and less self-conscious habit of phrasing. The *Arcadia* describes the adventures of the princes Musidorus and Pyrocles, who, being shipwrecked, disguise themselves as rustics, and fall in love with their fellow-sojourners in the forest, Pamela and Philoclea, daughters of Basilius, King of Arcadia, and his wife Gynecia. Pyrocles, who has adopted the garb of a shepherdess, is loved in that capacity by the king, and in his own person by Gynecia, who has penetrated his deception. There results a long and complicated series of intrigues, which are at last resolved in happiness and marriage. By far the most interesting character in the book is the love-stricken Gynecia. But the charm of the volume lies not so much in its plot or psychology as in its general atmosphere of romance, and in the fair flowers of fancy which light up its pages. 'Baccha and Leucippe, two ladies of noble birth, the latter of a fine daintiness of beauty, one that could do much



good and meant no hurt.' 'Queen Helen, whose jacinth hair, curled by nature but intercurled by art, like a fine brook through golden sands, had a rope of fair pearl, which now hiding, now hidden by her hair, did, as it were, play at fast-and-loose with each other, mutually giving and receiving richness.' 'Phalantus his horse, young, and feeling the youth of his master, stood curvetting, which being well governed by Phalantus, gave such a glittering grace as when the sun in a clear day shines upon a waving water.'

The wide scope of Elizabethan prose is strikingly illustrated Hooker. by the fact that the styles of Lyly and Sidney could flourish side by side with that of Richard Hooker. Hooker, whose personality lives for us in the quaint and delightful *Life* by Izaak Walton, wrote his greatest work, *The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, in order to assert the authority and worth of the Established Church of England against its Puritanical assailants. These had clamoured for a far stricter discipline, for the abolition of bishops, and for the uprooting of all popery. Hooker, before meeting them on their own ground, devoted the first book of the *Ecclesiastical Polity* to examining the nature of law, and distinguishing between those elements of it which were divine and universal, and those which were of merely temporary obligation. Having done this, he protested against a too rigorous employment of Holy Scripture in the determination of divine law, and pleaded for a system of church government which should follow its own revelation without attacking the revelation vouchsafed to others. He next shows that the Elizabethan Church fulfils this condition; he defends her and her prayer-book against the charge of popery, and examines and exalts her conception of sacramental grace. The first five books of *The Ecclesiastical Polity* are admittedly Hooker's own; the last three are more doubtfully so. The whole work represents a conception of religion and church government which in largeness and profundity was worthy of the highest humanistic tradition. Rare even with the greatest contemporary humanists are the serenity and dignity with which Hooker meets his opponents in controversy; and these qualities of spirit are also main qualities of his style, which even in its least inspired moments possesses symmetry and balance, and at its best achieves a majesty and rhythm uncommon in English prose of any period. Hooker shuns the extravagant as carefully as Lyly had ensued it: he allows little ornament for ornament's sake; but his thought fashions its own beauty, and often kindles into strange fervours. No prose writer of his day is more definitely in the genius of the language.

The Elizabethan novel, as we have seen, had Lyly and The Elizabethan Sidney for its greatest practitioners. The form was not entirely new in English literature. Before the appearance of the novel. printing press, verse which might be easily memorized and transmitted, had been the favourite medium of imaginative

fiction: yet, both before and after Caxton's day, the prose romance had existed and had sometimes even achieved greatness, as in Mandeville's voyages, Malory's great narrative, and the translations of Berners. In the age of Elizabeth, the use of prose in fiction had been quickened by the growing preference for the vernacular, and by its employment in translation, Biblical and secular, and in the drama.<sup>1</sup> It was largely through these influences that the Elizabethan period saw the rise of the novel as a modern form. Though the old romantic themes had fallen into disfavour, romance itself had achieved a new lease through the chivalrous and pastoral elements which came into English fiction from foreign sources. The most notable result of these influences is Sidney's *Arcadia*.

A more courtly element had passed into the novel from the treatises of North and Hoby, and had found highly-wrought expression in *Euphues*. *Euphues* and the *Arcadia* had numerous imitators, and many of these reproduce the colour of both novels. Thus Lodge's *Rosalynde*, famous as the chief 'source' of *As You Like It*, suggests by its sub-title—*Euphues his Golden Legacy*—a debt to Lyly, yet really owes far more to Sidney. Greene, in *Mamillia* (1580), tries his hand at Euphuism, but in a series of novels—*Pandosto* (1588), *Perimedes* (1588), and *Menaphon*—displays the influence of Sidney, both in style and setting. The debt of Shakespeare to the first and third of these novels is discussed elsewhere in this volume. In his later novels Greene adopts a different theme and fashion. In his *Mourning Garment* (1590) and *Never too Late* (1590), he portrays in the form of romance certain incidents of his own erring and pathetic life, and this self-revelation appears more realistically and poignantly in his last works, *A Groat's worth of Wit bought with a Million of Repentance*, and *The Repentance of Robert Greene* (both 1592). In more than one of these novels appears a character which occurs also in his plays, the wife wronged and deserted by her husband, yet bearing her injuries with patience and forgiveness. In a further class of work Greene deals with London criminals and courtesans as he had known them, describing them literally and by way of warning in his *Notable Discovery of Cosenage* (1591), and more strikingly and dramatically in his *Disputation between a He-Coney-catcher and a She-Coney-catcher*.

A good deal of the work of Thomas Nash (1567–1601) falls under a different heading; but his picaresque novel, *The Unfortunate Traveller, or The Life of Jack Wilton*, gives him a leading place among the pioneers of English fiction. The European novel of vagabondage and roguery derives from the Spanish *Lazarillo de Tormes*. In exploiting its vogue and describing the roving life of a fictitious English page—somewhat resembling the roving student of Quevedo's *Pablo de Segovia*—Nash undoubtedly prepared the way for Defoe. Equally

<sup>1</sup> See the *Cambridge History of English Literature*, vol. iii, chap. xvi.

Greene's  
novels.

Nash and  
Deloney.



realistic, though not strictly of the picaresque order, are the novels of Thomas Deloney (1545 ?-1605 ?), which portray the bourgeois life of Elizabethan England, though some of them are nominally set in the historic past. His *Thomas of Reading* deals with the clothiers; his *Jack of Newbury* has for its hero a Berkshire weaver, and in *The Gentle Craft* he introduces the shoemaker, Simon Eyre, who reappears as the chief figure in Dekker's play *The Shoemaker's Holiday*. In his realistic method and his addiction to bourgeois types, Deloney again anticipates Defoe, and may even be said to be the forerunner of Dickens and Mr. Arnold Bennett. His style is delightfully racy and humorous; yet neither he nor his fellow-craftsmen could give the contemporary English novel the greatness which had already been achieved by the drama. There was not as yet the requisite tradition; and as far as novel writing was concerned, the age is rather one of brilliant beginnings than of high and steady achievement.

A few aspects of Elizabethan literary criticism have already been mentioned in connexion with Ascham and Sidney. We may now discuss certain other writers in this kind, together with the general principles for which they stand. Here, as in other paths of literature, the prevailing influence was that of classical humanism, which, as far as criticism was concerned, had been largely interpreted to England by Italian and French writers. Classical learning, now fully discovered for the first time, furnished the modern world with great exemplars, both in prose and verse, and not only with these, but with much luminous critical theory. The masterpieces of antiquity, at first read for their own sake by the scholar, were early and eagerly adopted as models by the man of letters. He had tried his own literature in this respect, and had found it wanting: save in a few cases, it seemed to him to be loose and unsatisfactory alike in subject, handling, and metre. Some kind of reformation, backed by sound theory, appeared necessary were English to live and progress. These convictions gave rise to various critical speculations, some technical, some general. Among the technical the most notorious was the effort, already noticed in connexion with Ascham and Sidney, to establish a system of versification based on classical prosody. Extremists even advocated the substitution of quantitative for accentual scansion.

Closely connected with this attempt were the attacks made upon 'rude beggarly rhyming', and the effort to abolish it as a practice unworthy of a high and serious literature. These critical heresies are explained, though hardly justified, by the disorder into which English poetry had been allowed to relapse since the day of Chaucer. An early and unconvincing practitioner of the quantitative classical hexameter, was Thomas Watson, Master of St. John's College, Cambridge; a few years later his theories were being expounded by Thomas Drant, a fellow of the same college. The infection spread from

Literary  
Criticism.

The War  
against  
Rhyme

St. John's to Trinity Hall, whence Gabriel Harvey transmitted it, shortly before 1570, to his friend, Edmund Spenser. Spenser speedily and magnificently shook himself free of it, but it afflicted critics like Webbe and Puttenham, and versifiers like Stanyhurst and Fraunce. The struggle for and against the 'new versing' raged fiercely among the critics. Most of the poets were occupied with better things: yet one of them found time to hit hard at a principle so alien to the genius of English poetry:

Sweet Poesy<sup>1</sup>

Will not be clad in her supremacy  
With those strange garments (Rome's hexameters),  
As she is English; but in right prefers  
Our native robes (put on with skilful hands—  
English heroics) to those antic garlands.

Campion  
and  
Daniel.

In the years 1602-3 the issue was slightly shifted and fought out to a finish. Thomas Campion, himself an exquisite artist in rhyme, wrote a treatise entitled *Observations on the Art of English Poesy*, in which he attacked 'that vulgar and easy kind of Poesie which is now in use throughout most parts of Christendom, which we abusively call Rime'. Campion, though he repudiated the English hexameter, set up a claim for various rhymeless measures including the English sapphic and the English anacreontic, and concluded with a defence of quantitative scansion. He anticipated opposition on the part of 'many glorious' (i.e. vain-glorious) 'enemies, and those very expert and ready at their weapon that can if need be extempore (as they say) rime a man to death'. He can hardly have expected, however, that the opposition would produce one of the truest and finest pieces of criticism in the language—*The Defence of Rhyme*—in which his conclusions were triumphantly refuted by Samuel Daniel. Daniel shows that the analogy between English and classical poetry will not hold: 'for as Greek and Latin verse consists of the number and quantity of syllables, so doth the English verse of measure and accent.' Rhymeless lyric has many qualities of high poetry, but rhymed lyric has all these, and more, and greater. 'Our Ryme (which is an excellency added to this work of measure and a harmony far happier than any proportion antiquity could ever show us) doth add more grace and hath more of delight than ever bare numbers can possibly yield.' Daniel concludes his defence of English poetry—for it is to this in effect that his treatise amounts—in words of passionate conviction: 'And therefore here I stand forth to defend the sacred monuments which contain the honour of the dead, the fame of the living, the glory of peace and the best power of our speech, and wherein so many honourable spirits have sacrificed to memory their dearest passions, showing by what divine influence they have been moved, and under what stars they lived.'

<sup>1</sup> Chapman, *Hymnus in Cynthiam*, ll. 86-91; see Gregory Smith, *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, Introduction, p. 59.



Closely akin to the question of prosody were the more general questions of diction and style. English was only gradually establishing itself, in the hands of writers like Ascham, as the medium in which Englishmen might safely write of serious things. The triumph of the vernacular was helped and quickened by the great patriotic impulse of the age; but with its establishment arose many questions as to its true and proper form. On the one hand it was felt that English had achieved no settled standard, and that it needed every device which could be legitimately used to give it strength and beauty. To some writers this improvement seemed best effected by recourse to classical models: thus Sidney blames Spenser's archaism inasmuch as it was not 'affected' by Theocritus or Virgil. By others, English archaisms were allowed and even encouraged: thus Gascoigne in his *Making of Verse* declares that in some places 'a strange word doth draw attentive reading'; and 'E.K.', in the Epistle Dedicatory to Spenser's *Shepherd's Calendar*, remarks 'that often-times an ancient word maketh the style seem grave and, as it were, reverend'. To many writers, on the other hand, the purity of English prose seemed gravely endangered by the introduction of archaisms, classical borrowings, neologisms and 'ink-horn terms'. This line of criticism casts back to Ascham and Wilson, and is reflected later in Nash's dislike of what he calls 'overracked absonism' and 'balductums'—'the ooze which overflowing barbarism, withdrawn to her Scottish northern channel, had left behind her'.<sup>1</sup> Similarly Sidney, in what seems certainly an attack on Euphuism, refers<sup>2</sup> to 'that honey-flowing matron, eloquence' as being 'apparelled, or rather disguised, in a courtesan-like painted affectation'; and Daniel speaks<sup>3</sup> of our affectation, 'wherein we always bewray ourselves to be both unkind and unnatural to our own native language in disguising or forging strange or unusual words'. Untroubled by this critical antinomy, Elizabethan poets and prose writers continued on their way, practising both kinds of writing, the simple and the ornate, with a decided preference for the latter.

The different views regarding diction reappear with a difference in reference to the larger questions of form, structure, and handling. Here the strict classical principle took the form of insistence on literary propriety, or as George Puttenham<sup>4</sup> calls it, decorum, seemliness, comeliness, or decency. This tendency manifests itself constantly and variously throughout the criticism of the age: many writers try to apply the maxims of Horace to contemporary poetry: more noteworthy still are the recurrent strictures made by the advocates of decorum upon contemporary drama. Sidney struck the dominant note when he taxed *Gorboduc* and other plays of the period with failing to observe the unities, with containing 'gross absurdities', and with mingling the serious with the flippant, so that they

<sup>1</sup> *A Reply to Harvey.*

<sup>2</sup> *Defence of Poesy.*

<sup>3</sup> *Defence of Rhyme.*

<sup>4</sup> *The Art of English Poesie*, Chap. XXIII.

Critical  
Theories.

Questions  
of Form.

became neither right tragedies nor the right comedies; and the outcry was maintained till the day of Jonson, who in two of his plays<sup>1</sup> defined strictly the laws of tragedy and comedy, and in another<sup>2</sup> uttered his scorn for the authors who within the compass of one play

make a child, now swaddled, to proceed  
Man, and then shoot up, in one beard and weed  
Past threescore years; and with three rusty swords  
And help of some few foot and half foot words  
Fight over York and Lancaster's long jars,  
And in the tyring house bring wounds to scars.

Didacticism and  
Delight.

Such criticism as this was first and foremost literary; but there were also moral purists at work, and as we have seen in the case of Sidney, their challenge in some sense determined the tone of the reply. Thus Lodge, in his reply to Gosson, asserts with much violence the moral and civic usefulness of poets; and Nash holds that a main end of poetry was to teach 'moral precepts of manners, illustrated with divers examples of other kingdoms and countries'.<sup>3</sup> Neither critic had yet learnt, nor perhaps could any writer learn till the day of Shelley's great *Defence*, that poetry's end is to touch the imagination profoundly, and that if she once does this, all other things, including morality, shall be added unto her. The champions of poetry propitiated her persecutors by flinging to them some of her own children to mangle. The repudiation of the mediaeval romance commonly made by the Elizabethan writing man—and sometimes, as in Nash's case, made with considerable savagery—was really a sacrifice made to the artistic and ethical precisians. Yet the Elizabethan men of letters by no means confined their defence of poetry to an assertion of her respectability and of her aptitude to 'grind moral corn in the Philistine mills'. No man ever praised her beauty more fitly or fervently than Sidney: less ecstatic but not less sound is the statement of Puttenham that poesie is 'the common solace of mankind in all his travails and cares of this transitory life: and in this last sort, being used for recreation only, may allowably bear matter not always of the gravest, or of any great commodity and profit, but rather in some sort vain, dissolute or wanton, so it be not very scandalous and of evil example'.

Pedantry  
and  
Romance.

If these writers asserted the freedom of poetry against the puritans, others were found to assert it against the pedants. At a time when England's creative writers were forging her greatest romantic literature, it was unthinkable that her critics should allow poetry to be confined by classical formulae, however worthy and august. It was impossible at the period that all men should unite in recognizing the rightness of all the 'nine and sixty

<sup>1</sup> *Every Man out of his Humour*, and *Poetaster*.

<sup>2</sup> *Every Man in his Humour* (Prologue).

<sup>3</sup> *Anatomy of Absurdity*.



ways' of verse; yet Sidney, as has been shown, expressed his delight in the ballad, which to many had become a thing of scorn; and Daniel, defending the despised Middle Age, declared that 'it is but the clouds gathered about our own judgement that makes us think all other ages wrapt up in mists'. Daniel's *Defence of Rhyme*, with its insistence on freedom of literary judgement and development, has justly been described<sup>1</sup> as an 'important document on the side of romanticism'. Elizabethan writing men, indeed, were constantly romantics without knowing it, and not least so in the passion with which they sought out the soul of all learning and beauty. This intellectual eros suffuses Chapman's *Defence of Homer*, and passes into poetry in Daniel's *Ulysses and the Siren*. It reappears again in the eager aspiration of men like Carew to vindicate 'the excellency of the English tongue'; and in the wider vindication of English thought and poetry, it finds noble expression in Daniel's *Musophilus*.

From the enormous mass of Elizabethan prose we can select only a few further kinds. Among the great Tudor chroniclers one of the earliest and most notable was Edward Hall (d. 1547). His account of English history between the reigns of Henry IV and Henry VIII is painstaking in its earlier part, and often vivid and brilliant in its latter, where Hall was writing of what he had seen and known. More famous, through the use made of them by Shakespeare, are the *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland*, edited, and in great part written, by Raphael Holinshed. The early part of Holinshed's narrative deals mainly with the legendary kings of Britain, and is one of the sources on which Shakespeare drew for *King Lear*; but the debt becomes greater and more obvious when the narrative passes from legend to history, for on this portion of it Shakespeare has drawn freely for the greater number of his English history plays. He has sometimes indeed deigned to use the very language of Holinshed, whose style, though it does not possess the colour of North's, is often spirited and moving, as in the description of the combat between Mowbray and Bolingbroke. A notable contribution to Holinshed's collection was the *Description of England* by William Harrison, a treatise at once quaint, informative, and aglow with the national pride which lends peculiar gusto to all the chronicles of the period.

Richard Grafton (d. 1572) and John Stow were contemporary and rival chroniclers: junior to both was John Speed. The greatest of these was undoubtedly Stow, a tailor who gave the best part of his life to the study of his country's greatness. He left two sets of English Chronicles (1565 and 1580) besides his famous *Survey of London* (1598), perhaps our main document for the topography of the city at this period. A greater scholar than any of these was William Camden (1551-1623), headmaster of Westminster School, who wrote in Latin an admirably

The Tudor  
Chroni-  
clers.

<sup>1</sup> Gregory Smith.

clear and full history of England and Ireland beneath Elizabeth's rule, wherein he celebrated his country's glory with finely tempered enthusiasm. An equally fine work is *Britannia*, a learned and attractive account of his journey through England in 1582.

The Tudor  
Trans-  
lators.

We have already seen that there were two main tendencies in English prose during the Elizabethan period, and that the one making for ornateness prevailed. Its victory is curiously evident in the great translations, prose and verse, of the period. Modern translation, even at its greatest, is seldom strongly individual; its virtue consists rather in fidelity than in originality. This could not be the case in the Tudor period, where all men, including writing men, were individualists, and variety was the law of life. Certain it is that the Elizabethan translator thought but little of scholarship, in the word's strict sense, and sought, above all things, to be free and racy. Strict scholarship was, indeed, impossible when, as happened with North and Nicolls, the translator made his rendering of a classic from a French intermediate version. The Elizabethan translator, having thrown off the shackles of accuracy, danced freely and gaily. He used all manner of words that came to his hand, giving the vernacular free head, now filching a lively phrase from the gutter, now embracing his sentence with a splendour all his own. As a result the Tudor translation, whatever its faults, had the quality of an original: it was thoroughly individual and vital; and it was vitalizing as well, as may be seen from its influence upon the Tudor novel and play. To the drama it supplied a particularly famous exemplar; for Sir Thomas North's *Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans* (1579), translated from Amyot's French version of Plutarch's Greek, supplied the theme, and even, in many cases, the language, of Shakespeare's three Roman plays. North was to his sources, if we may use the words of a play he helped to inspire, 'as is the osprey to the fish, who takes it by sovereignty of nature'. The richness and colour of his prose is evident in the great passage describing the coming of Cleopatra to Antony on the Cydnus, which Shakespeare paraphrased and hardly bettered.

North.

Florio,  
Holland,  
and  
others.

Another notable translation was John Florio's version of Montaigne, which has been widely read by Englishmen ever since it was published. Florio used slang and fancy figures of speech even beyond the wont of his colleagues. No translation of the day is more readable. More scholarly than either of these two was Philemon Holland (1552-1637), who by his translations of Livy, Pliny, Plutarch, Suetonius, and Xenophon, amply deserved the title conferred upon him by Fuller of 'Translator Generall'. Other considerable prose versions of the classics are Adlington's Apuleius and Sir Henry Savile's Tacitus. Other men were at work upon Aristotle, Xenophon, Sallust, and Cicero. Many, too, were translating from modern tongues. Painter in his *Palace of Pleasure* (1566-67) drew not only upon the classics, but upon Boccaccio and Bandello.



North's *Diall of Princes*, translated from Guevara's Spanish, has been noticed elsewhere. There were also many verse translations: one or two of these were notable, and one, as we shall see, was great. The heresy of classical prosody finds a practical outlet in Richard Stanyhurst's translation from Virgil in alleged English hexameters. The ten-syllabled couplet was chosen by Joshua Sylvester (1563-1618) for his uninspired translation (1590) of the *Divine Semaine*, a huge poem by the French Huguenot, du Bartas. The rhyming octave was used to far finer effect by Edward Fairfax in his rendering (1600) of Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata*. But the staple metre of the Elizabethan verse translator was the 'fourteener'—the fourteen-syllabled rhyming couplet employed by Phaer, Golding, and Chapman, in their respective versions of Virgil's *Aeneid*, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and Homer's *Iliad*. The work of Phaer and Golding is worthy and workmanlike. Shakespeare had read the latter's version, and had drawn on it for a famous passage in *The Tempest*. But Chapman's translation is a thing apart. The pedants have tried to damn it, and are trying still; but the poets know better, and have hailed it as a great poem in its own right. Chapman, for all his Greek, missed the letter of Homer time and again; but he was one with Homer in spirit, and his lines at their best have the right Homeric glory and speed. Chapman's original poems (which include the *Shadow of Night*, *Andromeda Liberata*, and *Tears of Peace*) are obscure, but contain many beauties. He continued Marlowe's *Hero and Leander*. His plays and his *De Guiana Carmen* are noticed elsewhere.

Chapman's  
Homer.

The pamphlets of the period form a literature by themselves. Though the rise of the printing press had made this form popular, yet its use for political and theological purposes was restricted by the severe penal laws in force against such publications. The theological disputes of the time, however, produced one set of tracts which may fairly claim to rank as literature. These are the Martin Marprelate pamphlets, published in the Puritan interest and directed against the oppressive administration of Archbishop Whitgift, the Puritans' most determined enemy. Seven of the tracts are extant: they were issued from a secret and itinerant press, and attacked the bishops with great scorn and vigour. Some doubt attaches to their authorship, but it seems certain that one Job Throckmorton had a considerable hand in them. The anti-Martinists replied in a fresh series of pamphlets, few of which possess literary value, despite the fact that Lyly, and probably Nash, helped to write them. They include the quaintly named *Pap with a Hatchet*, and *An Almond for a Parrot*, the first of which is certainly by Lyly. The controversy was ended by the drastic legislation passed against the Puritans and their literature in 1593.

The literature of  
Crime and  
Fashion.

Passing from theology to crime—*facilis descensus*—we reach a series of pamphlets which describe the habits of contemporary rogues, vagabonds, and thieves. Awdeley, who was

far from being the first in the field of English criminology, had published in 1561 his *Fraternity of Vagabonds*. He was followed by Thomas Harman, whose *Caveat for Common Cursitors* is an examination, at once scientific and entertaining, of the rascally types he had studied at first hand as a Justice of the Peace. Greene's 'coney-catching' pamphlets, which also represent his personal experience, have been noticed elsewhere, together with the rest of his prose. Dekker's *Bellman of London* and *Lanthorn and Candle-light* (both 1608) are interesting specimens of this kind. A whole series of Elizabethan pamphlets dealt with London life in its various aspects. Greene had brilliantly exploited this theme in his *Quip for an Upstart Courtier* (1592). Nash developed it with equally brilliant satire in *Pierce Penniless his Supplication to the Devil*, and more tragically in *Christ's Tears over Jerusalem*. *Pierce Penniless* throws a good deal of light on the life of the Elizabethan literary man, and incidentally affords some queer information regarding contemporary diabolism. Perhaps the raciest portrait of contemporary London life, however, is that supplied in Dekker's *Gull's Horn-book* (1609), which tells an aspirant how to become a full-fledged 'gull' or rakish man about town.

The pamphlet, like the drama, was at this period constantly made the weapon of personal controversy. Thus Nash uses it for the discomfiture of his enemies, the Harveys, in his brilliantly vituperative little treatise, *Have with you to Saffron Waldron*.

Tudor Satirists. Whatever was its precise object, the pamphlet was nearly always satirical in tendency; and for this reason, as for others, it was well suited to express the pulsing vitality of its period. Many writers in this kind were unconsciously helping to prepare the way for greater than themselves: thus it has been noticed that the Marprelate pamphlets in some sense anticipate *The Tale of a Tub*. It might similarly be claimed that the verse satire of the period, as practised by Joseph Hall and Marston, anticipates the satire of Pope. This form was used freely by these two writers for personal controversy. Hall's *Virgidemiarum* (1597) consists of 'toothless' satires, aimed at things or institutions, and 'biting' satires, which hit hard at individuals. John Marston in 1598 published *Certain Satires*, and in 1599 *The Scourge of Villainy*: these poems are rougher in execution and fiercer in spirit than those of Hall, whom they attack acrimoniously. The satires of these two, and of certain minor men, supply curious pictures of the manners and vices of the time; but outside the drama, the Elizabethan age produced no satirist of the first order.

Literature of the Sea. Some of the finest prose of the period deals with England's maritime enterprise and discovery. The literature of the sea casts back to Alfred, and the interest in far lands and waters had been maintained throughout the Middle Ages by accounts of travel, mythical as in Mandeville, or real as in the narrative of Marco Polo. But it was not till the middle of the sixteenth



century that the interest in travel became widespread and produced a literature of considerable volume. The Elizabethan sailor and the Elizabethan man of letters were so closely akin in spirit that a remarkable result might have been predicted from the union of their activities. In 1576, the great voyager Sir Humphrey Gilbert, published a notable volume, his *Discourse to prove a passage by the West to Cathaia and the East Indies*. This was an elaborate attempt to prove by 'authority', 'reason' and the course of the currents, that the passage was navigable, had been navigated, and, if rediscovered, would be of supreme value to England. The concluding sentence of the treatise expresses the whole spirit of the man and his age: 'He is not worthy to live at all that for fear, or danger of death, shunneth his country's service or his own honour.' Hawkins has left a spirited account of his 'troublesome voyage to the parts of Guinea and the West Indies' in 1567 and 1568. Frobisher's valiant attempts upon the North-West passage were brilliantly chronicled by his friend, Captain George Best. In 1595, eight years after his own last Northern voyage, that great seaman, John Davis, published his *World's Hydrographical Description*. The lengthy sub-title of this treatise expands the maxim enunciated seventy years before by Robert Thorne—the maxim which, as Professor Raleigh remarks, is 'fit to be inscribed as a headline in the charter of Britannia'—that 'there is no land uninhabitable, nor sea innavigable.'

But the greatest monument to the glory of Elizabethan seamanship is that of Richard Hakluyt (1552–1616). Hakluyt devoted his whole life to the study of English exploration, and after publishing certain smaller volumes, he gave the world the great collection known as *The Principal Voyages, Traffics and Discoveries of the English Nation* (1589–98). With this achievement in view he studied books innumerable, old and new, digested a multitude of 'old records, privileges and letters', and made 'long and chargeable journeys' in search of communicative mariners. The result has been fitly called the 'great prose epic of the English nation'. Hakluyt, beginning with Arthur, passes on to Ohthere's 'Voyage beyond Norway', discusses the charter of the Cinque Ports, and at last comes to the subject which lay nearest to his heart, the prowess of the Elizabethan voyagers. He takes all the accounts of these which he can obtain, and edits them wisely, giving them unity without destroying their originality. He chronicles Drake's expedition to Cadiz, the voyages of Davis and Frobisher, the heroic and disastrous attempts made upon the North-East passage by Willoughby and Chancellor, and the adventures by land and sea of the astonishing Anthony Jenkinson. There are many descriptions of minor voyages. Sea fighting, too, finds recognition, as in the account of the Armada, and of Cavendish's destruction of the great Spanish galleon, the 'Santa Anna.' Throughout Hakluyt's whole narrative runs the pride

Hakluyt.

of the man and his age in the unparalleled glory of England's achievement by sea.

Purchas  
and  
Coryat.

Hakluyt's work was carried on by Samuel Purchas (1577-1626) in the collection of voyages known as *Hakluytus Posthumus* or *Purchas his Pilgrims* (1625). This, though not the equal of Hakluyt's collection in quality, easily outgoes it in length, and supplies a vast amount of information concerning early enterprises in the East, later expeditions to the North-West, the voyages of circumnavigation of Drake and Cavendish, and, indeed, all memorable aspects of contemporary 'discovery'. There were many other volumes describing English travel by land and sea. One of the most curious was the *Crudities* of that eccentric and indomitable traveller, Thomas Coryat, the friend and butt of many Elizabethan writers, who travelled over Europe, for the most part on foot, and eventually made his way overland to India.

The  
Poetry  
of 'Dis-  
covery'.

The pride of the age in its seamen and seamanship and in the beginnings of English colonization is reflected throughout the poetry of the period. It is implicit in many an allusion of Shakespeare's, and becomes explicit in such poems as Chapman's *De Guiana Carmen* (1596):

Guiana, whose rich feet are mines of gold,  
Whose forehead knocks against the roof of stars,  
Stands on her tiptoes at fair England looking,  
Kissing her hand, bowing her mighty breast,  
And every sign of all submission making  
To be her sister, and the daughter both  
Of our most sacred maid.

In *The Virginian Voyage* Drayton becomes constructively the poet of England's Outer Empire, and in the nineteenth song of *Polyolbion* he pays eloquent and patently sincere homage to the great discoverers. Here is his praise of Martin Frobisher:

Then Forboshier, whose fame flew all the ocean o'er,  
Who to the North West sought huge China's wealthy shore,  
When nearer to the North that wandring seaman set,  
Where he in our hott'st months of June and July met  
With snow, frost, hail and sleet, and found stern Winter strong  
With mighty isles of ice, and mountains huge and long,  
Where as it comes and goes, the great eternal light  
Makes half the year still day and half continual night,  
Then for those bounds unknown he bravely set again  
As he a sea-god were, familiar with the main.

Raleigh's  
Prose.

We may conveniently discuss the prose of Sir Walter Raleigh under this heading, since one of the most spirited narratives in Hakluyt is his description of the great sea fight of 'The Revenge'. This was originally published in 1596 under the title *Report of the Truth of the Fight about the Isles of the Azores this last Summer*. This gave Tennyson the matter for his poem 'The Revenge'; but even Tennyson has hardly been able to better some of Raleigh's strokes. There are many fine descrip-



tive passages in his treatise on Guiana published in 1596, the year after his first expedition to that country. Raleigh's keen eye for nature, and his love of gorgeous colours and precious stones, are evident in many passages of this narrative. He left several other treatises; but his most comprehensive work is his *History of the World*, written during his captivity in the Tower, and published in 1614. In this he treats of the 'first three monarchies of the world, whereof the founders and erectors thought that they could never have ended'. His narrative runs from the Creation down to the final subjugation of Macedonia by Rome. The work is greatly planned and is executed with erudition: to modern readers its main interest lies in the dignity and beauty of utterance which characterize its preface and many of its digressive passages. Thus he writes: 'O eloquent, just and mighty Death! Whom none could advise, thou hast persuaded; what none hath dared, thou hast done! and whom all the world hath flattered, thou only hast cast out of the world and despised: thou hast drawn together all the far-stretched greatness, all the pride, cruelty and ambition of man, and covered it all over with these two narrow words *Hic Jacet*.'<sup>1</sup> There are few more moving passages in English prose than the farewell letter written by Raleigh to his wife, after the death sentence had been passed upon him.

Some of the wittiest work of the period appears in the pages of its 'character'-writers. When character-writing first became fashionable, the essay had not yet found itself in England, though it was speedily to do so through the influence of Montaigne and in the practice of Bacon: meanwhile, the 'character' fulfilled some of its more human functions. Character sketches occur incidentally throughout earlier English literature; but the 'character' as a specific literary form owes its existence firstly to the Roman imitators of Theophrastus, and secondly, and chiefly, to Theophrastus himself, studied at first hand in the Latin version of Casaubon. Theophrastus,<sup>2</sup> the disciple and successor of Aristotle, had described a number of types whom he conceived as diverging from the mean in which his master had found the true rule of conduct. His first English imitator was Joseph Hall (1574-1656), bishop and satirist, who published in 1608 his *Characters of Virtues and Vices*. Unfortunately Hall's so-called characters are for the most part not characters at all, but pegs on which to hang abstract and somewhat threadbare characteristics. As may be seen from a glance at his moralizations on *The Ambitious* and *The Unthrif*t, he lacked those deft yet simple strokes through which Theophrastus' characters cease to be mere abstractions, and become living men and women. Hall, moreover, had a tendency to preach, and to preach heavily: this spoilt his chance of writing

'Character'  
Writing.

Hall and  
Breton.

<sup>1</sup> *History of the World*, Book V, Chap. VI.

<sup>2</sup> For an account of the stages by which Theophrastus established himself in England, see 'Theophrastus and His Imitators' by G. S. Gordon in *English Literature and the Classics*, Oxford.

'characters' successfully, for a 'character's first characteristic is lightness'. Hardly more successful was Nicholas Breton (1545-1626), who in *The Good and the Bad* (1616) contrasted the qualities of *A Noble Man, An Unnoble Man, A Worthy Knight, An Unworthy Knight*, and other abstract beings. Breton sometimes achieves a striking sentence, but never a living portrait.

Overbury. Much more brilliant were the *Witty Characters and Conceited News* appended to the second edition of Sir Thomas Overbury's poem *The Wife*, and published in 1614, after his death. These were written by Overbury and his friends. Their language is individual, and, in general, spirited. There is much wit in them, and also a good deal of strained and fantastic phrasing. They vary greatly in handling and spirit: some are eulogistic, but the most readable are the satirical. The colour of the age and the feeling of life are frequently reproduced—sometimes with gusto, as in the portrait of the 'Mere Scholar': 'the antiquity of his University is his creed, and the excellency of his college (though but for a match at football) an article of his faith: he speaks Latin better than his mother tongue: and is a stranger in no part of the world but his own country.'

Earle. Still finer work is evident in the *Microcosmographie* (1628) of John Earle (1601-1665). Earle had not only wit and style: he had a most keen and delicate sense of character. He can be as satirical as Overbury at his fiercest. Thus of the 'Mere Dull Physician' he writes: 'the best cure he hath done is upon his purse, which from a lean sickliness he hath made lusty and in flesh.' Of a gallant he remarks: 'His first care is his dress, the next his body, and in the uniting of these two lies his soul and its faculties.' Many of Earle's 'characters', however, are written in a neutral vein, and he is just as admirable in this as in the more easily managed satirical kind—a fact which proves his superiority to Overbury. But delightful as is his wit, his most precious attributes are his rare tenderness of feeling, and his gift of delicate and poetic phrase. Both these qualities are seen at their highest in his perfect portrait of 'A Child'; but they reappear in his description of 'A Good Old Man': 'All men look on him as a common father, and on old age for his sake as a reverent thing.' The same beauty is present in his word on the 'Contemplative Man': 'He looks not upon a thing as a yawning stranger at novelties: but his search is more mysterious and inward, and he spells Heaven out of Earth: He knits his observations together and makes a ladder of them all to climb to God.' In Earle, character-writing reaches its highest development. He had many imitators, including Cleveland, Butler, and Law. The greatest of these is Butler: yet if Butler can hold his own with Earle in wit, he lacks the delicacy, insight and poetic gift which make Earle's collection a thing apart. The difference in quality between the two men may be gathered from a comparison of their respective portraits of 'An Antiquary'.



Character-writing, as has been frequently pointed out, has much in common with the variety of drama known as 'The Comedy of Humours'. Had either the essay or the novel been firmly established in England, the 'character' must have at once become absorbed in these kinds. As things were, the absorption was only gradual. The transition to the essay-form had already begun when Earle deserted men and women to discourse of the places in which they might be found—'A Tavern' or 'Paul's Walk'. Here he already anticipates much that is to follow in *The Spectator*.

Another phase of the transition is evident in Nicholas Breton's *Characters upon Essays*, in which he deals entirely with abstractions, though he retains the brief and epigrammatic 'character' form. In the period of Addison and Steele, the 'character' is no longer specialized, but occurs incidentally among the themes of the periodical essayist. Its transfiguration is Sir Roger de Coverley.

The collaboration in any literary project of 'certain learned men to the number of four and fifty' hardly gives promise of a masterpiece: yet it is to such collaboration that we owe the greatest prose classic in the English language, the Authorized Version of the Bible (1611). The labours of these scholars were the outcome of the Hampton Court Conference held in 1604 for the adjustment of ecclesiastical differences under the presidency of James I. James took the keenest interest in the translation, and ordered provision to be made for the translators, who were almost entirely Oxford and Cambridge men.<sup>1</sup> The Preface informs us that the work extended over nearly three years; it probably also included two years of preliminary research. The work of the original translators was overseen and corrected by a board of twelve revisers. The principle adopted is thus defined in the rules set down for the translator's guidance: 'The ordinary Bible read in Church, commonly called the Bishops' Bible, is to be followed, and as little altered as the truth of the original will permit.' In adopting the Bishops' Bible as their basis, the translators were, in fact, drawing on all the best that had gone before, including the versions of Tindale and Coverdale. Among their chief glories is the fact that they left the finest part of this unaltered. Such changes as occur were made with supreme literary tact and feeling. The result is a work uniquely great. Its qualities have been well described by Froude as those of 'mingled tenderness and majesty, Saxon simplicity, and preternatural grandeur'. Its style has given inspiration to great English writers from Milton and Bunyan to Wordsworth, Ruskin, and Swinburne.

We have already seen that during the sixteenth century the English tongue was having a hard fight to establish itself as the

The  
Author-  
ized Ver-  
sion of the  
Bible

<sup>1</sup> For a list of them and an account of their method of working, see *Records of the English Bible*, A. W. Pollard, p. 49 seq.

medium of English thought. How hardly Latin died may be seen from the fact that Robert Burton (1577-1640) regretted the necessity which caused his great work, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621), to appear in English. The fact that it did so doubtless caused the book to lose something in continental vogue at a time when Latin was still the universal language: yet had it been written in that tongue England would have lost a classic, and one which, unlike some classics, has been widely popular from the time of its appearance onwards. 'Scarce any book of philology in our land', writes Fuller, 'hath in so short a time passed so many editions.' The contemporary vogue of the *Anatomy* is a high tribute to the taste of the age, for there are few countries and periods in which a work so learned could be so widely read, whatever its literary quality. The theme of the book is Melancholy, studied in relation to the human body and soul. A great deal of it is medical, and describes the physical means by which melancholy may be caused and avoided. Few medical treatises have been so quaint and readable as Burton's. Thus he lays down in his dietary scheme that beef is a 'strong and hearty meat', whereas goat is a 'filthy beast and rammish, and its flesh will breed rank and filthy humours'. The claim of the hare to be a 'merry meat' is unjustified; in reality it is 'a black meat, melancholy, and hard of digestion: it breeds incubus, often eaten, and causeth fearful dreams'. Burton refers with gusto to a type of invalid unhappily not extinct in our own day—'the melancholy Jew mentioned by Montanus who was so waspish and suspicious that no one could continue inoffensively in his company'. Melancholy, he held, was often the work of devils and their lord, 'the ringleader to all naughtiness': he instances a nun who was possessed with a devil for eating a piece of lettuce without asking a blessing. Yet the *Anatomy* is by no means a mere collection of quaint ideas and phrases: it has a serious interest, and its author frequently achieves real eloquence and distinction. Especially is this so in the latter part of the book, where Burton deals with 'love-melancholy' and religious melancholy. Much of his best writing occurs in his continual ethical digressions, particularly in those in the division entitled 'Remedies against Discontents'. His prose has not the magical depth and beauty of Browne's: yet it has vigour and a strange charm. Johnson admits that it is overloaded with quotations, but adds there is 'great spirit and power in what Burton says when he writes from his own mind'. He told Boswell that *The Anatomy of Melancholy* was the 'only book that ever took him out of bed two hours sooner than he wished to rise'. Many men before and after Johnson have had pleasure in the volume. Sterne borrowed from it in *Tristram Shandy*, Lamb and Coleridge loved it, Keats used a quotation from it as the text of *Lamia*, and expressed his admiration for Burton in his letters. There are few moods in which the *Anatomy* cannot be read with pleasure.



Francis Bacon (1561–1626) occupies a place apart among the writers of the period, and is as important in the evolution of English prose as in that of English philosophy. The work of his which is now most widely read is one which he himself depreciated; for he tells his brother Antony that his ‘Essays’ were but ‘fragments of his conceits’, and he apparently regrets that they were written in English, one of ‘these modern languages’ which ‘will at one time or another play the bankrupt with books’. The first edition of the *Essays* was published in 1597: between it and the third, and much fuller, edition which appeared in 1625, came the sequence of his philosophic works, the chief of which are *The Advancement of Learning* (1605), *Novum Organum* (1620), and *De Augmentis Scientiarum* (1623), which is the *Advancement* translated into Latin, with additions. This last work was written during his retirement at Gorhambury after his disgrace; and to the same period belong his *History of Henry VII* (1622) and the *New Atlantis* (1624), his picture of the ideal commonwealth which might, in his view, be realized through long and diligent investigation of natural law. The necessity for such investigation was the basis of his whole philosophy. ‘The mind is the man,’ he said, ‘and knowledge mind: a man is but what he knoweth.’ Nature, as embodied in her various ‘forms’ could be discovered and exhausted, were the right method once found: the task was difficult, since ‘the subtlety of Nature is greater many times over than the subtlety of argument’. There had, moreover, been many false guides, and not the least false had been Plato and Aristotle. Yet the matter was of supreme moment, for a complete discovery of Nature would not only perfect men in knowledge, but would help them towards creation. The right method was everything: it depended on the collection of a complete set of instances which might serve as the basis of a cautious and gradual induction. Nature must be followed, not anticipated: yet men were constantly kept from the sight of her by their own ‘idols’—the prejudices of their race, individual idiosyncrasy, profession, or dogma. Bacon apparently believed himself to have been the originator of the inductive method which he so eloquently advocated. Though this belief is incorrect, it is his statement of that method, combined with his conception of science as a single whole, which constitute his philosophic greatness. His chief philosophical work is undoubtedly *Novum Organum*; but his vast and eager intellectual purpose is evident throughout *The Advancement of Learning*: ‘Thus have I made, as it were, a small globe of the Intellectual World as truly and faithfully as I could discover: with a note and description of those parts which seem to me not constantly occupate or not well converted by the labour of man.’

Bacon’s early collection of essays was intended for himself or for private circulation among his friends: a further edition, with additions, was issued in 1612; and the final edition of Bacon’s *Essays*.

1625 was expanded into fifty-eight essays. This progression is accompanied by a growing elaboration and improvement of style consequent on his consciousness that he was now writing for the public, and even for posterity. The themes of the essays are various: they range from Goodness to Gardens, and from Envy to Masques and Triumphs. It must be confessed that Bacon's wisdom, as expressed in his more abstract essays, is often acute and worldly rather than profound. His conceptions, both of Friendship and of Greatness, make rather disconcertingly for utility, and his rules of life seem often mere maxims of state-craft—maxims quite appropriate in his essays on Counsel and Cunning, but much less so when they are applied to the highest things. Yet when generalizing upon him thus, we may remember that he has written: 'the desire of power in excess caused the angels to fall: the desire of knowledge in excess caused man to fall: but in charity there is no excess; neither can angel or man come in danger by it.' 'For a crowd is not company and faces are but a gallery of pictures, and talk but a tinkling cymbal where there is no love.' His later essays on concrete things, on Gardens and Building, have peculiar charm: 'God Almighty first planted a garden. And indeed it is the purest of human pleasures.' 'He that builds a fair house upon an ill seat committeth himself to prison.' The style of Bacon's essays is more curt and self-conscious than that of his philosophical works. Epigram is frequent, yet is always ordered judiciously and with measure. The expression is artificial, yet seldom ornate: there is none of the Euphuistic lavishness. Many of the images are homely, and are expressed with a cunning simplicity. Thus malignant men 'in other men's calamities are, as it were, in season, and are ever on the loading part: not so good as the dogs that licked Lazarus' sores, but like flies that are still buzzing upon anything that is raw. Such dispositions are the very errors of human nature; and yet they are the fittest timber to make great politiques of: like to kneetimber, that is good for ships that are ordained to be tossed, but not for building houses that shall stand firm.' The finish and balance of Bacon's style helped to give tradition to English prose, and prepared the way for Dryden.

Jonson's  
*Discoveries*.

A broader and more virile sweep is to be found in the prose of Ben Jonson. The most notable example of this is the posthumously published *Timber, or Discoveries made upon Men and Matter* (1641). This, in substance, is Jonson's commonplace book, his collection of extracts from the writers of antiquity, altered and amplified till it assumes the form of an original work. Short though the collection is, it is quite sufficient to prove Jonson one of the great prose masters. It contains a famous appreciation—not depreciation, as has been sometimes asserted—of Shakespeare, together with much manly moralizing upon life.

Selden.

John Selden (1584–1654) was a great lawyer and a great scholar, whose erudition is perpetuated in his elaborate treatise



tises, *Titles of Honour* (1614) and *History of Tithes* (1618). Much more widely read is his famous *Table Talk*, posthumously published in 1689 by his whilom secretary, Richard Milward. These 'discourses' as their sub-title indicates, relate 'especially to Religion and State'; but they cover a variety of other subjects, and illustrate not only their author's learning and intellectual incisiveness, but his easy versatility and trenchant wit.

## CHAPTER XIII

### DRAMA : THE AGE OF SHAKESPEARE

Shakespeare's predecessors — Lyly, Nash, Peele, Kyd, Marlowe, Greene — Shakespeare — His relation to his contemporaries — Jonson, Chapman, Marston, Dekker, Middleton, Heywood, Webster, Tourneur, Massinger, Beaumont and Fletcher, Ford, Shirley — Minors

IN the preceding chapter upon early English drama we dealt with certain dramatic kinds, but encountered few independent personalities of the first order. In our present period, however, both the acting and the writing of plays are becoming regular and professional, instead of fitful and amateur; and with this change notable names at once appear.

Among the first of these is that of the last regular dramatist of the Court—John Lyly. He and the remaining playwrights now to be considered are commonly termed 'the University Wits'—a name which accurately represents their general attitude toward life and literature, but must not be taken as implying that it is possible to discover a common factor for their dramatic work. Lyly's career is interesting, as illustrating the growing connexion between the school stage and the public stage, and also as showing how the centre of dramatic interest was beginning to shift away from the Court. Shortly after leaving Oxford he had achieved fame and Court favour with his prose romance, *Euphues, the Anatomy of Wit* (1579). After this he becomes certainly the playwright, and possibly the Vicemaster, of the children of St. Paul's, and for performance by these writes the eight dramas which bear his name. These were produced in the first instance for the benefit of the Court, but according to the practice of the time, the boy company converted the period of rehearsal into a regular professional season in a playhouse at Blackfriars. This had been provided for Lyly by his patron, the Earl of Oxford; he had to retire from it for a period on the 'inhibition', or prohibition, of the children's companies in 1591.

Lyly's plays vary considerably in theme and manner. The earliest and most charming of them, *Campaspe* (1580), is a free exercise in romantic dramatization, and portrays the love passage between the captive maiden and the painter, Apelles, who is eventually enabled to win her through the magnanimity

of Alexander the Great, himself a claimant for her heart. *Mother Bombie* (1590) is a brisk and realistic comedy of contemporary life, in which the Roman model is adapted to the humours of an English country town.

Others of Lyly's plays, e.g. *Sappho and Phao* (1581), *Endimion* (1585), and *Midas* (1589), are allegories, whose classical themes embody reference to contemporary affairs of high public moment. The first two deal with the suits respectively paid to Elizabeth by d'Alençon and Leicester, and the third expresses the national hatred and scorn felt for Philip the Second of Spain. In the remaining three, *Gallathea* (1584), *Love's Metamorphosis*, and *The Woman in the Moon* (1592 ?), pastoral, romantic, and classical elements blend, and the allegorical element is in abeyance.

His Place  
in English  
Drama.

The genius of Lyly opened new possibilities to English drama, and supplied it with fresh qualities of form and finish. As has been seen, the themes of his choice were varied, and so were the literary and dramatic kinds to which he turned for their development. His importance lies in the skill with which he smoothed and fashioned the material at his disposal into a rounded artistic whole, and in the delicate sensibility which enabled him to draw from each source, were it pastoral or mythological, early Roman or modern Italian, precisely that portion which would blend and harmonize with the rest. Nowhere is his skill more evident than in his handling of allegory, in his suffusion of it with poetry and fancy. In point of plot, he shows a greater fastidiousness than most of his predecessors, and carefully avoids the cruder elements of Senecan drama. He is equally an artist in dialogue, and especially in the form, comparatively new in English, of prose dialogue. His plays bear nearly all the main marks of his earlier Euphuism—wit, grace, antithesis, and a delicate artificiality which the youthful Shakespeare did not disdain to copy.

Nash and  
Peele.

To the same group of playwrights belong Thomas Nash (1567–1601) and George Peele (1558–1597 ?). Nash collaborated with Marlowe in the *Tragedy of Dido, Queen of Carthage*<sup>1</sup> (1591), and also wrote a comedy, now lost, entitled *The Isle of Dogs*. In the one surviving play which represents his undivided authorship, *Summer's Last Will and Testament* (1592), elements of the older Morality are blended with rude comedy. Nash's real strength, however, lies not in drama but in the novel and the pamphlet.

More important, in relation to the drama, is George Peele (1558–1597 ?), whose *Arraignment of Paris* (1582 ?), composed while he was still a graduate in residence at Oxford, is a courtly allegory, written in verse of no mean charm and beauty. The subsequent career of Peele illustrates the growing importance of the public stage. Lyly, in spite of the grievous disappointment occasioned by his failure to attain

<sup>1</sup> This play is discussed later in this chapter, under the heading of Marlowe's dramas.



the Mastership of the Revels, remained till the end a hanger-on of the Court, and did not seek to utilize the new means of profit opened to him by the rise of the public theatres. Peele, however, early turned to the popular stage, and for this wrote all his remaining dramas. These include the indifferent Chronicle play, *Edward I* (1590-91); *The Battle of Alcazar* (1591 ?), a drama whose hero is the remarkable contemporary adventurer, Thomas Stukeley; and *The Old Wives' Tale* (1590 ?) which, like its greater successor, *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, satirizes effectively the crude machinery of the dramatized romances. Peele's scriptural play, *David and Bethsabe*, has been already noticed.

A much more important dramatic influence is Thomas Kyd Kyd. (1558-1594), who may be called the connecting link between the older Senecan drama and Shakespeare. The influence of Seneca is strongly evident in *The Spanish Tragedy* (circa 1587) and *Soliman and Perseda* (1592 ?). *The Spanish Tragedy* was written for the public stage, and enjoyed a vast and lasting popularity. It turns on the wooing of the fair Belimperia by the captured Balthazar, her rejection of him for Horatio, the son of the Knight-Marshal Hieronimo, Horatio's murder by Belimperia's villainous brother, Lorenzo, and the revenge taken for that deed by the crazed Hieronimo. The violent horrors of this play, and especially the revenge motive, are thoroughly Senecan in spirit, and inaugurate in English the 'Tragedy of Blood' of which *Titus Andronicus* is the type and *Hamlet* the apotheosis. The ghost and the chorus also appear, and so does the short antithetical Senecan dialogue of alternating lines. But to Kyd himself are due the love-passages between Horatio and Belimperia, which carry a note of moving passion hitherto hardly heard in English drama. The careful elaboration of the plot was also a valuable reinforcement to the hitherto crude technique of the public stage; but above all things *The Spanish Tragedy* is important for the new force, constantly, indeed, passing into crudity and violence, which it introduced into the faltering beginnings of English tragedy. The play stormed and held the popular imagination, and the raving Hieronimo was beyond doubt the favourite figure on the Elizabethan stage. In 1601 and 1602 Jonson made some powerfully-written additions to the play to fit it for revival by Henslowe. The *First Part of Hieronimo* is a crude play written by some imitator of Kyd in order to exploit the popularity of his masterpiece.

To Kyd must almost certainly be attributed the original play on the subject of Hamlet, commonly known as the 'Ur-Hamlet', which was subsequently revised and elaborated by Shakespeare in two apparently separate and distinct versions. According to one theory, traces of this lost play have been preserved in a German drama on the subject of Hamlet, *Der bestrafte Brudermord*, which was first printed in 1781, but probably first performed in 1629. Even the *Hamlet*

of Shakespeare, in its definitive form, has many features in common with *The Spanish Tragedy*: it is probable that the *Ur-Hamlet* had many more.

Marlowe—  
*Tamburlaine.*

A still greater force than Kyd was Christopher Marlowe (1564–1593). Educated at the King's School, Canterbury, he may well have taken part in the school plays which we know to have been performed there under the mastership of Anthony Rushe. Immediately after leaving Cambridge (1587) he produced the first of his two plays entitled *Tamburlaine the Great*; the second probably followed in the succeeding year. In its choice of hero, its development of character, and its free, loose handling of plot, *Tamburlaine* belongs to the class of heroic play of which *Sir Clyomon and Sir Clamydes* is one of the few surviving examples.

As this type already held the popular stage, Marlowe's contribution to English drama differs from that of Kyd, who introduced to it what had been already developed elsewhere. Nor can Marlowe share in the claim of Kyd to have helped the popular playwright substantially toward better methods of plot-construction. Yet, these facts apart, it is true that he rendered the same service to the heroic play which Kyd had rendered to the Senecan. The crude heroic type of hero which had hitherto held the public stage finds its transfiguration in *Tamburlaine*, that mighty figure eager with the joy of beauty, and bent on the conquest of the world. The right Renaissance zest for all loveliness and might flames forth in the apostrophes of *Tamburlaine* to his queen, Zenocrate, in his promises to his lieutenants, Theridamas, Techelles, and Usumcasane, and in his exultation over Bajazet and the other monarchs he has conquered. There is little enough of tragedy, as we moderns understand the word, in these 'tragical discourses'. No ethical issue is interwoven with the hero's progress, no Nemesis attends his vaunting pride, no chain of causality holds together the events of the play. Crudities and cruelties alike deface the story, and impair our sympathy for the conqueror. But his passion and pride and triumphant will are presented with an intensity of feeling and of poetry which had nowhere yet been seen upon the English stage. The whole spirit of the play, and of Marlowe, is expressed in these lines of *Tamburlaine's*:

Nature that framed us of four elements  
Warring within our breasts for regiment,  
Doth teach us all to have aspiring minds:  
Our souls, whose faculties can comprehend  
The wondrous architecture of the world,  
And measure every wandering planet's course,  
Still climbing after knowledge infinite,  
And always moving as the restless spheres,  
Will us to wear ourselves and never rest,  
Until we reach the ripest fruit of all,  
That perfect bliss and sole felicity,  
The sweet fruition of an earthly crown.



Even the concluding anticlimax finds its counterpart in certain aspects of Marlowe's genius.

Hardly less important than the play's dramatic and poetic quality was the medium in which it was written—blank verse, which Marlowe transferred for the first time from the academic to the public stage. This at once superseded the crude rhyming metres of the earlier popular playwrights—the 'jigging veins of rhyming mother wits' to which the prologue refers—and became the staple measure of English drama. The gain in freedom and flexibility was incalculable, and was enhanced by the new beauty and majesty which Marlowe imparted to his 'mighty line'.

In his second play, *Dr. Faustus* (1588), the Will to Power is still mighty, but it operates in the sphere of intellect rather than of action. Faustus, as a result of his compact with Mephistophilis, becomes a mightier Tamburlaine, aspiring to control the past and the future, and having devils for his tributary kings. The material horrors of the German *Faustbuch*, the original source of the *Faust* story, have been spiritualized and thus rendered infinitely more poignant and majestic. The concluding scene, in which Faustus awaits his doom, has greater intensity and terror than anything yet attempted in English drama. The play represents the tragedy of power, not, as *Tamburlaine* had done, its mere exaltation. It is probable that the crude buffooneries which deface *Dr. Faustus* came from another hand than Marlowe's.

*Dr. Faustus.*

Ambition and its downfall are again the subject of Marlowe's next play, *The Jew of Malta* (1589?). Barabas, the Jew who finds his Absolute in gold, and is despoiled by Christians of his treasure and his daughter, is a prototype of Shylock, and during the first three acts is heightened almost to his proportions; but in its two final acts the play degenerates into melodrama, and the reader's interest in Barabas has ceased long before he is boiled alive in the cauldron which he has set for the destruction of his foes. In *Tamburlaine* and *Faustus*, and to some extent in *The Jew of Malta*, Marlowe is handling the tragedy of power. In his next play, *Edward II* (1592), he displays the tragedy of weakness, and shows England's most feckless monarch at handgrips with destiny. Marlowe here shows a greater interest in plot than had been evident in his previous dramas. It has been well said<sup>1</sup> that *Edward II* 'displays an evident desire to escape from the one-man type of drama', and that 'this escape is effected—rather curiously and somewhat to the detriment of the piece—not by the juxtaposition of several figures of equivalent dramatic weight, but by giving predominating importance to each of two or three during various portions of the play'. The description of Edward's murder in the fifth act of this play is one of the most powerful passages in Elizabethan or in any drama.

*The Jew of Malta.*

*Edward II.*

Marlowe's *Massacre at Paris* (1592-93) is a feeble and dis-

<sup>1</sup> Tucker Brooke, *The Tudor Drama*, p. 251.

appointing drama of contemporary French history. Of greater interest is *Dido, Queen of Carthage*, accredited to him and to Nash, which contains several fine passages, and, in *Dido*, Marlowe's most successful picture of a woman. Marlowe's share in *Henry VI* will be discussed later, in relation to Shakespeare.

The popularity of *Tamburlaine*, which was second only to that of *The Spanish Tragedy*, kept before the Elizabethan playwrights the fact that the Senecan model was not the only one for English tragedy. The native way of handling drama had been triumphantly vindicated, and the result is evident in the criticism and practice of Marlowe's chief contemporaries. Some of these, notably Nash and Greene, paid him the tribute of jealousy, expressed in a form of venomous sarcasm. Yet Greene, who had sneered at his blank verse, and compared it to the 'fa-burden of Bo-bell', was forced by its popularity and evident merits, to make use of it in his earliest extant play, *Alphonsus, King of Arragon* (1588?). This is modelled throughout on *Tamburlaine*, which it outdoes in extravagance. *Alphonsus* is a mythical conqueror, who, after overcoming monarch after monarch, eventually defeats 'the Great Turk', and wins his daughter to wife. The play possesses little strength or interest, and abounds in absurdities and anachronisms. Even more absurd (1588?) is *Orlando Furioso*, in which Greene, following Ariosto, represents Orlando as in love with the fair Angelica, and driven mad through the machinations of his rejected rival, Sacrapant, a figure apparently recreated by Greene in deliberate burlesque of *Tamburlaine*. Hardly more successful or interesting is *A Looking Glass for London and England* (1589?), by Greene and Lodge, which contains curiously blended elements of the *Mystery*, the *Morality*, and the farcical *Interlude*, and describes the pride and downfall of Rasni, King of Nineveh, to the accompaniment of a moral chorus intoned by the prophets, Jonah and Oseas. If Greene's dramatic career had ended at this period, he would have been a mere name in the history of English drama; but far finer work is evident in his *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* (1589?). If his earlier plays were modelled on *Tamburlaine*, *Friar Bacon* undoubtedly owes much to *Dr. Faustus*. But Greene had by now realized that his strength did not lie in tragedy, and he allows his hero to remain a genial and patriotic wizard who engages our sympathies throughout the play—especially in his duel of magic with his rival Vandermast—and saves himself at the end from damnation after the fashion indicated in Greene's prose original, *The Famous History of Friar Bacon*. Interwoven with the tale of Bacon is a pastoral story developed by Greene with great charm and poetic feeling, centring round the love-match between Lacy, the disguised Earl of Lincoln, and the delightful country maiden, Margaret of Fressingfield. There is also a historical, or pseudo-historical, element in the play; and though Greene's blending of these several themes



is far from consummate, it is still successful, and successful at a period when the art of intricate plot-weaving was practically unknown in England. For this reason, and because he is undoubtedly the founder of English pastoral comedy, he must take high rank among Shakespeare's predecessors in drama.

More skilful still in construction is *The Scottish History of James IV* (1590 ?), which turns on James's love intrigue with the Lady Ida, and his unsuccessful attempt to murder his queen. The mastery over feminine character which led Nash to call Greene 'the Homer of Women', reappears here in the delicately drawn figures of Ida and Queen Dorothea. A fairy setting to the play is provided by the introduction of 'Oboram' in the prelude and interscenic passages, though it must be confessed that in point of charm between Oboram and Oberon there is a great gulf fixed. *George a Greene, the Pinner of Wakefield* (1590 ?) is a play of popular and national appeal, moving in the setting of an English countryside. It takes for its hero the keeper of a village pound who overcomes the rebellious Earl of Kendal, and when offered honour and reward by the king, craves only that he may be united to his true love Bettris.

*George  
a Greene.*

Apart from the qualities already mentioned, the main marks of Greene's genius are his chaste and exquisite lyric gift, and the vein of racy humour which runs through even his inferior plays.

Greene died in 1592 and Marlowe in the following year. By this time William Shakespeare (1564-1616) had already begun to write both poems and plays, and his early production in the latter kind attaches him to more than one of the names just mentioned. He probably left Stratford at the end of 1585, and soon after this he attached himself to the company of players under the protection of Lord Leicester, which had visited Stratford in 1573 and 1577. This subsequently became the Lord Chamberlain's company, and, after the accession of James I, passed under the patronage of the king, and was known as the King's Players. Shakespeare was attached to it during the whole of his career in the capacities of actor, playwright, dramatic adapter and reviser, and actor-manager. It is possible that in his early days of struggle he held horses at the door of the first regular playhouse in England, The Theatre, built by James Burbage at Shoreditch in 1576, and subsequently transplanted across the Thames to Southwark in 1598-9, and rechristened by the more famous name of The Globe. Shakespeare's first connexion with the stage was undoubtedly as an actor. What parts he took at this period must remain uncertain: the tradition which associates him with the Ghost in *Hamlet*, and Adam in *As You Like It*, belongs to a later period of his life. The combination of the playwright's and actor's profession was common throughout this period.

Shake-  
speare—  
Early  
Career.

His Early  
Comedies.

His first efforts as a dramatist almost certainly consisted of collaboration, or of revision of other men's work. As will be seen, some of his work in both these kinds survives; but the earliest specimens have been lost, and the play, *Love's Labour's Lost* (1590 ?), which is now generally considered to represent his first extant work, is entirely his own. This drama, together with *The Comedy of Errors* (1591) and *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (1592 ?), shows Shakespeare working tentatively in various dramatic kinds. It is significant of his later and habitual dramatic method that *Love's Labour's Lost*, his earliest play, should be the one which owes least to previous literary sources—the only one, in fact, in which the story is substantially of his own making. It turns on the attempt of the King of Navarre and his three lords to forswear love for learning, and on the revenge which Nature takes upon them for this resolve, through the fair persons of the Princess of France and her three ladies. The influence of Lyly is strongly evident in the play's style and development, in its antithetical dialogue, its courtly atmosphere, its conceits, its setting of 'love in idleness', and its references to contemporary events and personages. Although Shakespeare ridicules the affectations of the courtier, Armado, and the pedant Holofernes, his own mind is here wantoning in its new-found powers, and spending itself in the fine phrasing dear to youth, and in the still finer poetry put into the mouth of Berowne. Lyly's influence is still further evident in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, the plot of which came to Shakespeare, through earlier English versions or adaptations, from the Spanish romance, *Diana*, of Jorge de Montemayor. There is clear progress here, both in handling and characterization. Valentine and Proteus, Sylvia and Julia, are living and well-balanced figures, and despite the play's unsatisfying ending, the contrasted themes of love and loyalty in friendship are developed with a certain youthful mastery. There are some fine flights of poetry, and a foretaste of the splendid fooling that is to come in the later plays is supplied by Launce and Speed—not to forget Launce's dog, Crab, who, if not witty himself, is the cause of wit in others.

In *The Comedy of Errors* Shakespeare is seeking to develop another vein—that of Plautine comedy—which the youthful Ben Jonson was to handle in his early play, *The Case is Altered*. In Shakespeare's case the speed and bustle of the plot destroy any attempt at subtle and elaborate characterization. But youthful as his hand is, he handles his farcical and complicated theme with great success, and imparts a vitality and swing to his scenes which most English imitators of Plautus and Terence had missed. It is significant that both Shakespeare and Jonson, after trying their prentice hands on this kind, turn away from it to one in which character is given freer play. In these three plays we see Shakespeare exercising himself in two different dramatic kinds—romantic comedy and the classical comedy of incident and farce. In *Romeo*



*and Juliet* (first authorized, version printed in 1599 : original draft perhaps 1592) he was to attempt a higher flight. The ancient tale retold by Bandello lay ready to his hand in the English verse of Broke, and the English prose of William Painter, on both of whom he drew for the play. For the first time in drama Shakespeare is handling passion seriously, and showing human life face to face with tragic issues. His mind seems to go forth to the star-crossed lovers with all the sympathy and glow of youth, while many passages of the play are fraught with youth's aspiring music. Romantic love, seldom the dominating theme of his later tragedies, is here all sufficing. *Romeo and Juliet* is, indeed, rather a romance with a tragic ending than a tragedy in the sense in which *Hamlet* and *Lear* are tragedies : despite its intensity of beauty and passion and suffering, it does not suggest the universal issues which seem everywhere present in the great plays of Shakespeare's tragic period.

*Romeo and Juliet.*

To the same period may be perhaps assigned *Titus Andronicus*, a crude pseudo-historical Roman drama of lust and murder and horror. Shakespeare's company performed this play in 1594, but the present draft, which apparently represents a making-over of two older plays, may have been published a year or two earlier. Shakespeare's part in this play has been diversely estimated, some writers, e.g. Mr. J. M. Robertson, declining to believe that any of it is his. Yet while it is certain that he is not responsible for the whole of it, it contains strokes which could hardly have come from any other hand. The version on which he worked has been diversely attributed to Greene, Kyd, Peele, and Marlowe. The chief interest of the play, from our present point of view, is that it illustrates the work of revision which Shakespeare might be required to perform.

*Titus Andronicus.*

Before dealing with Shakespeare's historical plays we may here conveniently consider his two long poems, *Venus and Adonis* (1593) and *The Rape of Lucrece* (1594), written respectively in six-lined and seven-lined rhyming stanzas. In the first, Shakespeare retells with youthful sympathy the tale of passion which he had found in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and suffuses his stanza with much of Spenser's sensuousness. The poem as a whole is overweighted with conceits, and lacks the full fire and force of Marlowe's *Hero and Leander* ; but it contains some exquisite descriptions of Nature set forth in perfect poetry. Most notable in this regard are the descriptions of the boar, Adonis's charger, and the hunted hare. In *Venus and Adonis*, a woman is the seducer ; this part is played by man in the companion poem, *Lucrece*, which lacks the freshness of the first poem, but is wrought with equal metrical mastery and a graver sense of tragic issues.

Shakespeare's Poems.

We may deal with Shakespeare's historical plays separately, though the earliest among them certainly preceded some of the plays already noticed. The history play was the outcome

His Historical Plays.

of the great pride taken by the Tudor Englishman in the present and past glories of his nation. That pride was greatly quickened by the defeat of the Armada in 1588, and from then onward till the end of Elizabeth's reign there was a mighty output of chronicle plays, dealing with nearly every English monarch who had hitherto reigned, as well as with other historical persons of eminence, and with figures (e.g. Gorboduc, Lear, and Loqrine) of Britain's legendary past. The chronicle play represents in drama the same impulse which had led to the writing of prose historical chronicles by Grafton, Hall, and Holinshed, and of historical poems such as Drayton's *Barons' Wars* and *England's Heroical Epistles*, and Daniel's *Civil Wars*. As has been seen, this kind of play had already been handled by Peele and Marlowe, and by several anonymous writers.

*Henry VI.*

The first historical play in which Shakespeare had a hand is that which appears in the First Folio as *Henry VI, Parts I, II, and III*. The two latter parts had already appeared under different titles in three successive quarto forms, which, with variations, represent a version intermediate between a lost draft (presumably unshakespearean and possibly by Greene and Peele) and the lavishly revised text which is preserved in the Folio. It is now generally thought that Shakespeare and Marlowe revised this lost draft, and are thus responsible for the version of the quartos, and that Marlowe may also have collaborated with Shakespeare in the final revision. Only a small part of *Henry VI, Part I*, is Shakespearean. *Titus Andronicus* had shown Shakespeare working as reviser: *Henry VI* displays him as collaborator—and collaborator with Marlowe. In *Richard III*, which is entirely Shakespeare's own work, Marlowe's influence is strongly evident. Richard III, the defiant superman lustling and fighting for power, is of the same mould as Tamburlaine, the superman in the world of action, and Faustus, the superman in the world of thought. The intensity and aspiration of his language are Marlowesque, and there is much of Marlowe's clang and beat in the music of Shakespeare's blank verse. Senecan influence is obvious in the splendidly handled figure of Margaret, who broods over the play like an avenging genius. *Richard III* may perhaps be attributed to 1593, and its successor, *Richard II*, to 1594.

*Richard III.*

*Richard II.*

In this sequence there is again a curious parallel with Marlowe's practice. Marlowe, as we have seen, had shown the exaltation of might in *Tamburlaine*, and its tragedy in *Faustus* and *The Jew of Malta*; and in *Edward II* he had, apparently in conscious contrast, portrayed the tragedy of weakness. There is the same antithesis, conscious or unconscious, between *Richard III* and *Richard II*. The wistful and pathetic figure of the latter king is treated with a full sense both of its poetry and its tragedy. In psychological subtlety his character represents an advance on anything which Shakespeare had yet attempted in historical drama. Here,



as in *Richard III*, history, as presented in the prose narrative of Raphael Holinshed, presented Shakespeare with tragic material, and he handled it tragically : yet he keeps far closer to Holinshed than he does in the great tragedies of his later years, *King Lear* and *Macbeth*, where he draws on the same source, but where the historical motive is definitely secondary to the tragic.

In *King John* (1594 ?) Shakespeare, instead of going to the Chronicles, has worked over the old play, *The Troublesome Reign of King John* (1588). He takes all his characters from this, and follows it closely in point of structure, yet invests the old uninspired figures with new life, and develops with maturing power the contrasted tragedies of Constance and Arthur. The poignantly dramatic scene between Arthur and Hubert is a forecast of his later and greater tragic manner. His growing mastery of humour is evident in his portrayal of the Bastard Falconbridge. *King John.*

We may anticipate by dealing at once with Shakespeare's later history plays, postponing notice of the intervening comedies. In *Henry IV, 1 and 2* (1597-98), and *Henry V* (1599), Shakespeare creates a trilogy far greater than *Henry VI, 1, 2, 3*, though it has been noticed that in both sets of plays his manner tends more to the epic than it does in *Richard III, Richard II*, and *King John*, where the facts of history are so marshalled as to bring out their tragic significance. Thus, though *Henry IV, Part I*, takes up history where *Richard II* left it off, it represents a very great difference in atmosphere and feeling ; there is a wider sweep of plot, greater variety of character, greater complexity of dramatic motive. In both plays, however, Shakespeare relies for interest on strong dramatic contrasts. The cold and resolute Bolingbroke, who in *Richard II* had been used as a foil to the weak and irresolute king, is now used as Henry IV for quite a different contrast—as serving to show off the fiery temper of Hotspur on the one hand, and the ribald, roystering spirit of Prince Hal on the other. The feminine interest, save in the scenes between Hotspur and his wife, is in abeyance. But the main interest of the play, now as when it was first performed, centres in Falstaff, the greatest comic figure of all time, and his inimitable followers. *Henry IV.*

Falstaff, that radiant and indomitable ruffian, has been described as possessing something of the elemental and universal quality which we feel in Hamlet. Originally intended as comic relief, he becomes to us the play's central figure, overshadowing its original hero, Prince Hal, so that we feel his final rejection by the prince as pathetic and even tragic. Doubtless from a purely human point of view Shakespeare shared our feelings, otherwise he could hardly have put into the mouth of Mrs. Quickly in *Henry V* the imperishable words describing Falstaff's death ; but the historical idea informing the play, the Tudor ideal of strong and efficient kingship,

*Henry V.* demanded Falstaff's rejection as a preparation for the apotheosis of Hal which we find in *Henry V*. Here Shakespeare's 'sources' are the same as for *Henry IV*—Holinshed and the old play, *The Famous Victories of Henry V*. Henry is here shown as the champion of his country, and the incarnation of its valour and manly virtue.<sup>1</sup> The valiant poetry of the play, and the free and inevitable movement of its blank verse, display all the greatness of Shakespeare's maturing art. Pistol, Bardolph, and Nym, who here make their last appearance, are as racy as ever, and a new set of humours is introduced in Gower, Jamy, Macmorris, and Fluellen, with their contrasted national characteristics, and in the scenes between the king and the private soldiers, Williams and Bates.

*The Merry Wives of Windsor.* Before leaving the Falstaff plays, we may notice *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (1598 or 1599). Only here and in the Induction to *The Taming of the Shrew* do we find Shakespeare dealing dramatically with the realistic aspects of English life which were so freely handled by his fellow playwrights, Jonson, Middleton, Dekker, and Heywood. The plot was suggested by certain tales appearing in the Italian of Straparola and Ser Giovanni Fiorentino; but the handling, the atmosphere, and the humours incarnate in Dr. Caius and Sir Hugh Evans, are entirely native and entirely Shakespeare's own. There may be truth in Rowe's statement that Shakespeare wrote the play because Queen Elizabeth had ordered him to show her Falstaff in love: in any case Falstaff is here a diminished and degenerate figure, lit up only at times by flashes of his former greatness.

*The Merchant of Venice.* We must now go back a little in order to trace the sequence of Shakespeare's great comedies. *The Merchant of Venice* (1594-1595) shows him for the first time interweaving a double plot successfully. The story of the Jew, the pound of flesh, and the lady of Belmont had occurred in the *Pecorone* of Giovanni Fiorentino (fourteenth century) and in the *Gesta Romanorum*, which had also related in an independent connexion the tale of the caskets. The story had already been handled in a lost English play, and there are traces of Marlowe's Barabas in the drawing of Shylock. But the Jew of *The Merchant of Venice* becomes a towering figure, probably, since he precedes Falstaff in time, the greatest whom Shakespeare had yet drawn. To our modern sense, though probably not to the Elizabethan, he dwarfs all the other characters in the play, and walks upon the very verge of tragedy. The characterization of Portia and Nerissa, the trial scene, and the beautiful last act, show Shakespeare already writing romantic comedy with full mastery.

*The Midsummer Night's Dream.* The same skill in combining diverse elements is evident in *The Midsummer Night's Dream* (1595). Shakespeare may have

<sup>1</sup> The present writer rejects unhesitatingly the view (developed by Gerald Gould, *English Review*, July 1919) that Henry's character was drawn by Shakespeare with satirical intent.



borrowed the Athenian elements from Chaucer and thus from Boccaccio, and may also have drawn upon Plutarch and Ovid ; but his genius has so transformed his materials that the play becomes in effect a free creation of fancy and imagination. Oberon had already been presented crudely by Greene in *James IV* ; and fairies were used subsequently by many dramatists—notably by Ben Jonson in his masques. But Shakespeare's fairy world is a thing apart, and perfect. Its humour and beauty is skilfully interwoven with the cruder humours of the 'rude mechanicals' and with the fates of the mystified lovers. For sheer sensuous and lyric beauty this play can hardly be matched in Shakespeare's dramatic work.

*The Taming of the Shrew* (1596-7) follows an old play of unknown authorship, *The Taming of a Shrew* (1588), in the development of its main plot, and of the Induction. The underplot, introducing Bianca and her competing suitors, was taken from Gascoigne's *Supposes*. It is probable that these scenes are not Shakespeare's work, and it is possible that he did no more than retouch the scenes between Petruchio and Katharina.

*All's Well that Ends Well* (1598-1602), in the form in which we possess it, is probably a rehandling by Shakespeare of his own early draft of the play. Apart from metrical considerations, the pathetic and subtle delineation of Helena, the wooer of her unworthy lover, Bertram, seems to take the play beyond the period of Shakespeare's immaturity, and a similar indication is supplied by the perfect portrait of that great lady, the Countess of Rousillon. *All's Well that Ends Well* has a deeper psychological interest than any comedy Shakespeare had yet written. It is in a sense a problem comedy, a searching study in the psychology of sex, which he was to treat in a more poignant form in the later tragedies.

Shakespeare's next three comedies, *Much Ado about Nothing*, *As You Like It*, and *Twelfth Night*, probably all fall within the years 1599-1601, and represent the culmination of his, and indeed of the world's, romantic comedy. The tale of Hero and Claudio, which forms the original plot of *Much Ado*, had been told by Bandello, Belleforest, and Ariosto, and had been already dramatized in English. Shakespeare probably drew on the first two sources ; but the high comedy of Beatrice and Benedick, and the roaring low comedy of Dogberry and Verges, are entirely his own. Here, as so often in Shakespeare, the additions have outgone the original theme in interest. If they do not outgo it in the case of *As You Like It*, the honours are at least divided ; for to the tale of true love which he found to his hand in Lodge's prose pastoral, *Rosalynde*, *Euphues' Golden Legacy* (1590), he added Jaques, Touchstone, and Audrey. Similarly, the mediaeval story which is the primary theme of *Twelfth Night* had already been developed in three Italian plays, and probably came beneath Shakespeare's notice in a translation, French or English, of

*The Tam-  
ing of the  
Shrew.*

*The Great  
Comedies.*

Bandello's prose version of the tale; but to Shakespeare himself we owe Malvolio, Sir Toby, Aguecheek, Feste, and Maria, as well as the genius which interweaves their broader comedy with the romantic comedy of the overplot.

From  
Comedy  
to  
Tragedy.

These three plays are romantic in every sense of which the word is capable. Almost every scene is suffused with Shakespeare's sweetest and serenest poetry. Joy and beauty prevail, and are only enhanced by the broodings of Jaques, the love-sickness of Orlando, and the gloom and discomfiture of Malvolio. Love is treated with a smiling and kindly sympathy, and its handling is kept free of sentimentalism by Shakespeare's steadfast sanity of outlook, and by the keen, laughing criticism which his characters undergo at one another's hands.<sup>1</sup> Thus comedy, as with Meredith, becomes the ally of true romance, and the foe of false, freeing this human world alike from pessimism and pretence. The radiance of romance and joy which suffuses these plays could hardly have been present unless they had reflected a phase of Shakespeare's own feeling. Shortly after the opening of the seventeenth century, however, a different mood is noticeable, and some critics have even seen in the utterances of the melancholy Jaques evidence of a growing disillusionment in Shakespeare's own outlook upon life. Certain it is that in the plays of the following seven years—especially in *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Lear*, *Timon*, *Macbeth*—there is a prevailing gloom which seems to be not only dramatic but personal and, in the opinion of good critics, represents a tragedy of Shakespeare's soul. In all the plays just mentioned, there are vehement attacks on sex, and on all that makes for the continuance of life; and these occur, even where, as in *Hamlet* and *Lear*, they are not strictly necessitated by the dramatic situation. Some refuse to see anything personal in these plays; they consider that Shakespeare wrote tragedies at this period because tragedies were the fashion, and that this poignancy of utterance was entirely due to his transcendent dramatic imagination. Two facts seem, however, to tell against this view—the same feeling is to be found in many of his sonnets, which, in the opinion of all but very few, express his personal emotion: moreover, when he tried to write a comedy at this period he literally could not do so, but only succeeded in producing such 'very tragical mirth' as *Troilus and Cressida* and *Measure for Measure*.

*Julius  
Caesar.*

On the threshold of this period comes *Julius Caesar* (1600). The profoundly tragic spirit evident in this play is due to the fact that, when Shakespeare's own attitude toward life and art was changing and deepening, he chanced to go for his material to Plutarch, an artist inspired by the keenest sense of tragic issues. The main human and political interest of the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. the obvious instance of Beatrice and Benedick: also the testing of both Orlando and Jaques by the disguised Rosalind; and of Olivia by the disguised Viola.



play centres, of course, in the contrast between Caesar, the incarnation of the Roman Imperium, and Brutus, the noble idealist thrust on to murder by his impelling Republicanism. Secondary to these are Mark Antony, the hedonist stung into greatness by the murder of his benefactor; Octavius, cold and remorseless; Cassius, whose republicanism, though eager and real, is alloyed with earthiness; and Cicero, etched lightly, yet with vivid genius. Shakespeare, wishing to carry the action through to Philippi, and being thus forced to make Caesar disappear half-way through the play, is bound for dramatic reasons to prevent his becoming the supreme figure of the early acts; but if he in some sense diminishes the figure of the living man, he expands and heightens his spirit after death till it dominates the play, and brings the murderers to destruction.

Among the plays of the next few years the four great tragedies occupy a place apart. Their informing spirit has already been indicated. Holinshed, handled otherwise than in the historical plays, supplied the material for two of them—*King Lear* (1605-6) and *Macbeth* (1606?). In *Hamlet* (1602) Shakespeare drew on an old play, probably by Kyd, for the story told in the thirteenth-century *Historia Danica* of Saxo Grammaticus, and subsequently incorporated in the *Histoires Tragiques* (1570) of Pierre de Belleforest. The plot of *Othello*, like that of *Measure for Measure*, comes from *Hecatommithi* (1565), a collection of Italian tales by Giraldi Cinthio. The differing technique of the four plays illustrates strikingly the variety and consummate power of Shakespeare's genius. In *Othello* and *Macbeth* the action is single and direct, and satisfies the spirit, if not the letter, of classical unity: in *Macbeth* it moves with remarkable rapidity. In *Hamlet*, on the other hand, the whole structure of the play is based on the necessity of delaying the action by every conceivable device of technique. Here, though the themes are several, the plot is really one. In *King Lear*, on the other hand, there are three separate stories, interwoven with the greatest intricacy, and developed with a disregard of the neo-classical unities which is essentially romantic. *Hamlet* is the tragedy of a sensitive and generous soul, which at the outset of the tragedy has received a shock to its inmost moral nature, and falters beneath that blow from the terrible task assigned to it by fate. The play, however, is far more than the study of a Danish prince stunned by his mother's fickleness and set to avenge his father's murder: it is the tragedy of every imaginative nature which has ever been confronted with a duty too vast for its will and power. Hamlet's sense of the universal issues involved in his personal action, or inaction, gives profound meaning to the sufferings and problems of ordinary humanity, and explains the wide appeal of the play in all times and countries. Less transcendental in its suggestion, but equally poignant and universal in its appeal, is the

The Great Tragedies.

tragedy of Othello and Desdemona, betrayed by him who represents the most intense study in evil ever drawn by Shakespeare or by man. Swinburne considered *Lear* to be the outcome of Shakespeare's 'tragic fatalism', and held that in it 'requital, redemption, amends, equity, explanation, pity and mercy' are words without a meaning. This statement does not hold true of any of Shakespeare's tragedies; but it is far more nearly true of *Othello* than it is of *Lear*. In *Othello* Desdemona dies before she can understand the true cause of her husband's cruelty, and before he can sue for her forgiveness. There is no such alleviation or consummation as occurs in the scene in which Lear struggles forth from his insanity to be greeted by the tender love of the daughter he had wronged so cruelly. This scene, and that in which Lear and Cordelia comfort one another in captivity, surely make their deaths less terrible than those of Othello and Desdemona. The terror of *Lear* lies not so much in its conclusion as in its atmosphere—in the suggestion of sinister forces far mightier than man, which brood over the action of the play, sustaining the evil souls of Goneril and Regan and Edmund, and overcoming all things save the devotion of Cordelia and Kent and the crazy Fool. In *Macbeth* alone of the four great tragedies, Nemesis, working after the full Greek fashion, visits characters whose transgression is in some degree commensurate with their fate. Yet both *Macbeth* and *Lady Macbeth* have in them qualities—in his case imagination, in hers, highly-strung will, and in both, a mighty capacity for suffering—which redeem them from ordinary villainy, and win a certain sympathy with their fate.

*Troilus,*  
*Timon,*  
*Pericles.*

In two plays of this period—*Troilus and Cressida* (1602?) and *Timon of Athens* (1607)—tragedy—if *Troilus* be tragedy and not attempted comedy—has lost its majesty and taken a tinge of satirical bitterness. In *Timon*, as in *Pericles, Prince of Tyre* (1608), Shakespeare is found in collaboration with another playwright; in the case of *Timon* the collaborator may have been George Wilkins. The material for this play came to the writers from Plutarch through Painter's *Palace of Pleasure*: for *Pericles* they probably drew on the version supplied by Gower and Laurence Twine of the mediaeval legend centring round Apollonius of Tyre. Both plays are exceedingly unequal in execution. *Timon* represents the tragedy of a benefactor turned misanthrope through the ingratitude of friends who desert him when he has lost the means of helping and regaling them. He is the idealist driven by intolerable circumstances into pessimism, and his noble and passionate cynicism is powerfully contrasted with the vulgar cynicism of the professional misanthropist, Apemantus. *Pericles* is badly constructed, and a very great part of it, including Acts I and II, is obviously not from Shakespeare's hand; but several scenes, notably that containing the shipwreck and the birth of Marina, seem his beyond all doubt. *Troilus* is remarkable for the acridly drawn figure of Cressida, who loses all the



glamour she had possessed in Chaucer, and becomes a scheming and graceless wanton. Still more remarkable are the degraded and vulgarized presentations of Ajax and Achilles. Yet the play has fine passages, and is informed with sardonic power. *Measure for Measure* (1604?) is equally sinister, but in different kind. The play moves in a setting of lust where 'corruption boils and bubbles till it o'errun the stew'—lust finding its reaction in the hypocrisy of Angelo and the inflexible chastity of Isabella, who will not yield to Angelo's overtures even to save her brother's life.

*Measure  
for  
Measure.*

The two remaining plays of this period which may be attributed to Shakespeare's entire and certain authorship are *Antony and Cleopatra* (1608?) and *Coriolanus* (1608-9), for both of which his source is Plutarch. In *Coriolanus*, as previously in *Tamburlaine*, we find a superman of mighty will and ambition as the central figure of the action; but the thirty years which separate the two dramas represent a vast advance for the Elizabethan playwright in every essential of dramatic technique. The political theme is here consummately interwoven with the domestic. The contrast and clash between *Coriolanus* and the populace are varied and balanced by the sympathy between the conqueror and his mother, which in its turn produces a fresh clash of wills, and the fresh dramatic contrast between *Coriolanus* and Aufidius. Never was Shakespeare's hand more sure than in his delineation of the Roman mother, *Volumnia*, and the 'humorous' patrician, *Menenius Agrippa*. In this play *Menenius* plays a somewhat similar part, as commentator and chorus, to that played by *Enobarbus*, the down-right soldier, in *Antony and Cleopatra*. In this latter play Shakespeare has handled Plutarch freely and nobly, taking much from him, in some cases to his very language, compressing and excising much, but also adding much, and that of his finest work. He has given the wanton *Cleopatra* all the glamour he denied to the wanton *Cressida*, and has suffused the profligacy and intrigue of *Antony* with splendid poetry and imagination. Never has mere passion divorced from its higher spiritual elements been made more romantic than here. Despite the play's defects we may rejoice with Coleridge in its 'happy valiancy of style', and even share his doubt whether it is not 'in all exhibitions of a giant power in its strength and vigour and maturity, a formidable rival of *Macbeth*, *Lear*, *Hamlet*, and *Othello*'.

*Antony  
and Cleo-  
patra,  
Corio-  
lanus.*

The last phase of Shakespeare's dramatic production shows a marked change of handling and spirit. A new style of play, romantic rather than tragic, and terminating in peace and reconciliation, had been made popular by Beaumont and Fletcher, and other of Shakespeare's contemporaries. It was doubtless their example which led him to write such tragicomedies or dramatic romances as *Cymbeline* (1609) and *A Winter's Tale* (1610): yet the spirit of beauty and calm which pervades these dramas and *The Tempest* (1611) has been

The Last  
Phase.

regarded, with justification, as representing a certain personal reaction against the gloom of the tragic period. It is not the circumstance of the happy endings which lends colour to this view; for these, as has been pointed out, are probably due to the fashion of the day: it is the fact that the whole atmosphere and colour of these dramas differs from anything which was written, or could have been written, during the years which produced *Lear* and *Measure for Measure*.

*Cymbeline.* In *Cymbeline* Shakespeare drew on Holinshed for the tale of the British king and the Roman embassy, on Boccaccio for the theme of Imogen and Posthumus, and on his own genius for the story of the princes' kidnapping, and for the beautiful scenes portraying their upbringing by Bellarius. But to many the play remains chiefly memorable for her who is perhaps Shakespeare's most noble and exquisite heroine, Imogen. The difference between the plays of this period and the great tragedies is well illustrated by the difference between Shakespeare's handling of Iago and Iachimo: the latter villain, for all his blackness of heart, is drawn with far less intensity than his predecessor, and he is pardoned at the end, instead of being reserved for unspeakable torments.

*The Winter's Tale.* The plot of *The Winter's Tale* was taken by Shakespeare from Greene's novel, *Pandosto (Dorastus and Fawnia)*. It is perhaps the most loosely constructed of all his plays, and treats the unities with the true romantic contempt. The theme of Leontes' insane jealousy of his much-enduring queen, Hermione, leads onward to the delightful and most English idyll between their lost daughter, Perdita, 'the queen of curds and cream', and the disguised Prince Florizel. Hermione's youthful son, Mamilius, is drawn with mastery and charm, and not less masterly is the portrait of the light-hearted and rascally pedlar, Autolycus.

*The Tempest.* *The Tempest* (1611) is probably to be accepted as the last play which came entirely from Shakespeare's hand. The main story, that which concerns the beneficent wizard, Prospero, his daughter Miranda, and her lover Ferdinand, was the theme of an old romance, especially popular in Spain, but possibly reaching Shakespeare through the medium which inspired an extant German play, the *Comedia von der schönen Sidea*. The description of the island, and the suggestion of its being full of voices and inhabited by devils, are due to the narrative of the sufferings of certain English seamen recently shipwrecked on the Bermudas. Caliban is a creation of Shakespeare's own fancy, intended to represent the primaevae savage, and serving through his enforced subservience to exalt the might of Prospero. The wooing of Miranda, the child of Nature, by Ferdinand, the innocent son of her father's villainous foe, forms the main romantic theme. The isle contains as many villains as were subsequently to be found on Treasure Island, from the highborn Antonio and Sebastian to



Stephano and Trinculo, Shakespeare's last essays in low-born rascality. And over love and villainy alike watches Prospero, like the providence of the isle, dispensing their deserts to all at the end, and then bidding them good-bye as he takes a long farewell of his magic arts.

Several other plays have been traditionally attributed, either in part or in whole, to Shakespeare; but his authorship has been substantiated in but few cases besides those already mentioned. It is possible that he may have collaborated with Fletcher in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, a play dealing with the fortunes of Palamon and Arcite, already handled by Chaucer: it is practically certain that this collaboration occurred in the case of *Henry VIII*, though opinions differ as to Shakespeare's precise part in the play.<sup>1</sup> Katharine, in the quiet and queenly dignity with which she meets her undeserved sufferings, is certainly the outstanding figure in this drama. Neither Henry nor Wolsey is drawn with the same sureness of hand. The fine dying speech of Wolsey, though popularly attributed to Shakespeare, is probably Fletcher's. *Sir Thomas More*, a biographical drama, contains a fragment of Shakespearean work. In its original form, it represents the work of Munday, Dekker, and two unidentified dramatists, and is preserved in manuscript. On being offered to the King's Men, it was apparently handed over to the Company's poet for strengthening, and Shakespeare accordingly wrote a portion of one scene. His work here, consisting of less than 200 lines, is not merely of interest for its dramatic vigour, but is of unique value as being all that has come down to us in his hand. The play did not meet with the approval of the Master of the Revels, and seems never to have been staged. Its date is apparently about 1598-9, though attempts have been made to place it five or six years earlier. Two plays on the subject of contemporary murders, *Arden of Feversham* (1591?) and *The Yorkshire Tragedy* (printed 1608) have also been attributed to Shakespeare. Both of these are powerful, the former especially so; but in the opinion of the best modern critics neither bears the distinguishing marks of Shakespeare's genius.

Plays partly Shakespeare's or attributed to him.

In the foregoing summary an attempt has been made to disengage the chief qualities of Shakespeare's genius. His might and beauty are as generally and as confidently accepted as the might and beauty of the sun and sea. 'All joy, all glory, all sorrow, all strength, all mirth, are his.' There has been less agreement regarding the greatness of his chief contemporaries. All admit that he transcends them in power: some have even gone the length of denying even to the greatest any real spiritual kinship with him. To this extreme view

Shakespeare and his contemporaries.

<sup>1</sup> In the view of the present writer, the early part of Act I, the latter part of Act II, a small portion of Act III, the opening portions of Acts IV and V, are certainly Shakespeare's.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti inclines in his sonnet 'On Certain Elizabethan Revivals':

O ruff-embastioned vast Elizabeth,  
 Bush to these bushel-bellied casks of wine,  
 Home-growth, 'tis true, but rank as turpentine.  
 What would we with such skittle-plays at death?  
 Say, must we watch these brawlers' brandished lathe,  
 Or to their reeking wit our ears incline,  
 Because all Castaly flowed crystalline  
 In gentle Shakespeare's modulated breath?

According to a more natural view Shakespeare, apart though he stands in the world's reverence, has much in common with his chief contemporaries, and could not have become Shakespeare save through their example and fellowship. It may confidently be claimed that the greatest of them at their greatest moments reach his level. *The Duchess of Malfi* merits a place beside his great tragedies, and *Edward II* and *Perkin Warbeck* are not unworthy of the company of *Richard II* and *Henry IV*. Shakespeare's transcendency lies not so much in his having reached heights unscaped by others as in his having kept constantly upon the heights from which others, after reaching them, fell away. Even had he never written, the Elizabethan period would have been one of the greatest in the history of the world's drama. The praise of the Elizabethans has been sung rhapsodically yet with fine critical insight by Swinburne in a series of sonnets embodying a view quite different from that of Rossetti. Here he exalts Marlowe, 'son first-born of the morning, sovereign star'; Jonson, 'broad-based, broad-fronted, bounteous, multiform'; those 'warm twin lights' which

as day decreased  
 Waxed wider, till when all the sun had ceased  
 As suns they shone from evening's kindled crest;

'grave and greathearted Massinger'; Ford, 'whose hand with high funereal art carved night and chiselled shadow'; Webster, usurping 'the very throne of night, her very crown'; Dekker, 'sweetest heart of all his time save one'; Middleton, Heywood, Chapman, Marston, and the 'sons born of many a loyal Muse to Ben' as well as those anonymous

dim watch-fires of some darkling hour  
 Whose fame forlorn time saves not nor proclaims  
 Forever.

One great poet is best confuted by another; and if certain of Swinburne's tributes seem exaggerated, they are far more critical and balanced than the pronouncements of certain modern criticasters who decry the Elizabethans because their plays fail to embody the psychological or sociological fads of the nineteenth or twentieth centuries.

Throughout the rest of this chapter the main phases of



English drama will be traced onward from the work of Shakespeare's immediate contemporaries, down to the closing of the theatres by the Puritans in 1642. Only the greater men can be noticed in any detail; but we may at least indicate the existence of a number of playwrights, none of them of the first order, who wrote for the various dramatic companies. Notable in this class are certain writers for the Lord High Admiral's men, who under the direction of Philip Henslowe became the chief rivals to Shakespeare's company. For Henslowe, Antony Munday wrote *John a Kent and John a Cumber* (1594?), a play of wizardry and romance. He collaborated with Henry Chettle, another of Henslowe's men, in two plays on the subject of Robin Hood, *The Downfall*, and *The Death, of Robert, Earl of Huntingdon*. The chief play which Chettle wrote single-handed was *The Tragedy of Hoffman* (1602), a by no means contemptible essay in the 'Tragedy of Blood'. To William Haughton is accredited a bustling comedy, *Englishmen for my Money* (1598), and, more doubtfully, *Grim, the Collier of Croydon* (1600), in which a devil, Belphegor, appears upon earth and is made the dupe of human cunning and unscrupulousness. The sole surviving play of Henry Porter is *The Two Angry Women of Abington* (1596-98), a bright and admirable comedy of English country life. Michael Drayton is recorded in Henslowe's Diary as having taken part in twenty-three plays, none of which can be certainly said to have survived.

Reserving the junior playwrights of this class for subsequent mention, we may pass to the greater contemporaries of Shakespeare. There could be no more illuminating contrast than that between him and Ben Jonson (1573-1637). Whether in tragedy or in comedy Shakespeare's presentation of existence was essentially romantic, and remote from the atmosphere of contemporary life. Even when he uses features of that life, he universalizes them, and invests them with a glamour not their own. It is a different abstraction from life, and one far more closely conditioned by actual fact, that we meet in Jonson's most characteristic comedies. In his great tragedies, moreover, Jonson is first and foremost a classic, both in the strictness of his structure, and in the keen fidelity with which he paints the colour of a bygone age. The lordly licence allowed, and even ensued, by the great Romantic in both these regards, has no appeal for him. Similarly, even when Shakespeare's mind passes into gloom and bitterness, the resulting satire works *sub specie aeternitatis*, and is directed at the universal qualities of men. Jonson, however, is seldom a universal satirist: he is generally either a public satirist, lashing or mocking the fraud or the affected 'humours' of his day, or a private satirist, assailing his personal enemies with eager scorn and obloquy.

Jonson's earlier dramas include his essay in Plautine comedy, *The Case is Altered* (1598), and his promising comedy of London life, *A Tale of a Tub* (1601?); but his first really

Minor Playwrights.

Ben Jonson.

His Early Comedies.

great play is the comedy *Every Man in his Humour* (1598). It is significant of his growing tendency toward realism that this was originally published with an Italian setting, but that in the later Folio edition of 1616 it is transferred to the environment of Elizabethan London. The intrigue on which its plot turns is well managed, but by far the greatest interest of the play centres in its characters of contemporary life—Bobadil, the cowardly ‘skeldring’ soldier, Matthew and Stephen, the admirably contrasted ‘gulls’, Cob the water-carrier and his wife, and that delectable rascal, Brainworm.

In the considerably less racy *Every Man out of his Humour* (1599), Jonson portrays other contemporary types, e.g. Fastidious Brisk, the flashily dressed man about town, Carlo Buffone, the scurrilous jester and parasite, Fungoso and Puntarvolo. Many of the characters in this play, and in his next two comedies, *Cynthia's Revels* (1600) and *Poetaster* (1601), are intended as travesties of contemporary literary men. In *Poetaster*, in the course of a plot laid in Augustan Rome, Jonson satirizes his dramatic rivals, Marston and Dekker, with great power and zest. This play was his most notable contribution to the ‘War of the Theatres’, a kind of dramatic duel between the playwrights of the Chapel children performing at Blackfriars—for whom Jonson was at this time writing—and those representing the adult professional actors of the Globe and the Fortune Theatres. The most notable contribution on the men’s side was Dekker’s *Satiromastix* (1602). Shortly after this Jonson became reconciled to his adversaries, renounced personal satire, and wrote the first of his classical tragedies, *Sejanus*, which was acted by Shakespeare’s company in 1603. This, like the later *Catiline* (1611), is distinguished by a faithful portrayal of the Roman background, great sureness of characterization and diction, and considerable skill in the development of plot. But in both plays there are many dull passages; poetry of the first order is lacking, and there is little of Shakespeare’s inspired vision. Jonson’s real strength lay in comedy, and to this he returned in 1604, when he produced a capital drama of London life, *Eastward Ho*, in collaboration with his whilom enemy, Marston, and with Chapman.

His  
Tragedies.

His  
Greater  
Comedies.

During the next few years Jonson produced three plays, which may be regarded with *Every Man in his Humour* as his masterpieces. *Volpone* (1605) is a tense study in evil, portraying a miserly sensualist and misanthrope, who takes joy in leading his hangers-on into crime and disaster, till his machinations result in his own undoing. *The Silent Woman* (1609) is notable for its skilful and bustling plot, but still more so for the *vis comica* which has gone to the making of its main character, the misanthrope Morose, who hates noise, and jumps at the notion of marriage with a dumb woman, till after the conspirators of the piece have gained their ends the woman turns out to be a very noisy boy in disguise.



*The Alchemist* (1610) may justly claim to rank as Jonson's greatest play. Its main figure, Sir Epicure Mammon, is at once a generalized type of sensual greed and a human figure of extraordinary vitality, the one character of Jonson's who is worthy to rank with the greatest creations of Molière. The rascal, Subtle, who poses as the Alchemist, draws around himself and his two accomplices a diverting set of dupes and gulls, from Sir Epicure himself down to the credulous tobacconist, Abel Drugger, and the petulant spendthrift, Kastril. The plot, which has been described by Coleridge as one of the three most perfect in existence, culminates in the duping of the chief dupers. *Bartholomew Fair*, like *The Alchemist*, is full of the colour and incident of Elizabethan London; but it is inferior to its predecessor both in plot and characterization. It is a medley of strange types, and possesses little terseness, or cohesion of plot. Many of its scenes—notably those introducing Cokes, the foolish apple-snatching squire, Humphrey Wasse, his henchman and guardian, and the canting Puritan, Zeal o' the Land Busy—have a splendid vitality; but the canvas is too huge to fit the frame of drama.

Jonson's remaining comedies include *The Devil is an Ass* (1616), a play which, like *Grim the Collier of Croydon*, shows a devil duped by the superior cunning and wickedness of mortals—*The Staple of News* (1625), *The New Inn* (1629), and *The Magnetic Lady* (1632). These plays, despite their many brilliant strokes, show a distinct decline in power; but this is abundantly redeemed by the unfinished *Sad Shepherd*, Jonson's most beautiful play, which shows Robin Hood, Maid Marian, and their crew at home in Sherwood amid shepherds and fairies. Jonson had a weakness for the fairies, who reappear in more than one of his Court masques. Of this form he has left us some forty specimens ranking among the best of their kind in point of wit, grace, and skilful construction.

George Chapman (1559–1634) is better known to modern readers through his translation of Homer than through any of his plays: yet his dramatic output was considerable, and his limited capacity both for construction and characterization is redeemed, at least for the modern reader, by the splendid rhetoric, often deepened with metaphysical suggestion, and occasionally passing into great poetry, which recurs throughout his plays. These fall into three main divisions, of which the most important deals with certain recent episodes of French history. The best plays of this series are *Bussy d'Ambois* (1599?) and *The Revenge of Bussy d'Ambois* (1604), which portray the deeds of this celebrated French adventurer. Chapman's remaining plays on French subjects are *The Conspiracy*, and *The Tragedy of Charles, Duke of Byron* (both acted in 1608) and *The Tragedy of Philip Chabot, Admiral of France*. They portray several living historical characters, and show how the Elizabethan stage might sometimes perform the function of a modern newspaper by keeping men in touch

His last Plays.

Chapman.

with foreign affairs. Chapman's uneven, but frequently admirable comic power, is evident in three other plays, *All Fools* (1599), a complicated, skilfully managed, and most amusing comedy of intrigue; *The Gentleman Usher* (1601?), a charming romantic comedy; and *Monsieur d'Olive* (1605), chiefly remarkable for the racily drawn 'gull' who is its main character. His remaining dramas are inferior, and need not detain us here. His share in *Eastward Ho* has already been indicated. Jonson, who did not praise readily, praised Chapman's masques, only one of which has survived.

Marston.

John Marston (1576-1634), as we have seen, was one of the collaborators in *Eastward Ho*; he was also probably the reviser of *Histrionomastix* (1599?), an allegorical play embodying in the character of Chrisoganus a not unkindly portrait of Jonson. The earliest plays of Marston's original and unaided authorship, *Antonio and Mellida* and *Antonio's Revenge* (both 1599), are lurid essays in the 'tragedy of blood', with a vein of undeniable power threading their bombast and violence. In *The Malcontent* (1601), the bitter quality of his early verse-satires reappears in the utterances of the honest misanthrope who is the play's hero. *The Dutch Courtezan* (printed 1605) is a well-made comedy, notable for the rollicking Cockledemoy, one of the most amusing characters in Elizabethan drama. *Sophonisba* (1603) and *Parasitaster* (1604) are both inferior work. Only certain portions of *The Insatiate Countess* can be assigned to Marston: these display his lurid power, though the play is disappointing as a whole. Marston is a baffled and a baffling genius, constantly promising some great triumph in the sinister, yet never wholly performing it. Rupert Brooke says of him, 'he loved dirt for truth's sake: also for its own. Filth, horror, and wit were his legacy: it was a splendid one.'

Dekker.

Thomas Dekker (1570-1641?) was a prolific writer in various kinds, and one of the most unfortunate among Elizabethan writing men. The grinding poverty of his life,<sup>1</sup> and his acquaintance with debtors' prisons, seem to have deepened his sympathy with the lowly and oppressed, while in nowise impairing his exquisite lyric gift. His genial nature and his sympathy with popular types are evident in *The Shoemaker's Holiday* (1599), which is perhaps the earliest drama representing his unaided work. This interweaves a charming love story with the humours and intrigues of contemporary English bourgeois life. Simon Eyre, the master shoemaker, is a delightfully drawn figure, and the play, despite its elements of pathos, exhales the serene atmosphere of work and contentment which we breathe in Wagner's *Meistersinger*. There is more poetry and looser construction in *Old Fortunatus* (printed in 1600), a play in two parts, which shows the aspiration and strange adventures, and eventual disaster, of a somewhat Faust-like

<sup>1</sup> An attempt has been recently made to minimize this: cf. Mary Hunt, *Thomas Dekker*, p. 48.



character who chooses riches when offered his choice of Fortune's gifts. The part taken by Dekker with *Satiromastix* in the 'War of the Theatres' has been already indicated. In the same connexion may be mentioned *Westward Ho* (1604 ?) and *Northward Ho* (1606 ?), shameless comedies of contemporary life, written in collaboration with Webster, in the second of which Chapman is satirized. In *The Honest Whore* Dekker once more displays his gift of pathos, collaborating with Middleton in the first part (printed 1604) and working unaided in the vastly superior second part. In the plays of Dekker, as in the novels of Dostoievsky, passionate idealism constantly transfigures the most sordid scenes and subjects; and such idealism is abundantly evident in *The Honest Whore*, which in its culminating phase shows the reclaiming of the courtesan Bellafront, after her strangely moving experiences in the Bridewell and Bedlam. Her father, Orlando Frisco-baldo, who seeks her out and leads her back to virtue, is greatly drawn. The remaining plays which Dekker wrote unaided are little worth. He collaborated with Webster again in *Sir Thomas Wyatt* (1602), with Middleton in *The Roaring Girl* (1611), with Chettle and Haughton in *Patient Grissell* (1598), and with Ford in *The Witch of Edmonton* (1621) and *The Sun's Darling* (1623). *Patient Grissell* retells the old tale of Griselda, and contains Dekker's most famous lyric, 'Art thou poor yet hast thou golden slumbers?' which is put into the mouth of his delightful creation, the faithful servant, Babulo. *The Witch of Edmonton* is a highly pathetic dramatization of the fate of a woman tried and executed for witchcraft in 1621. *The Roaring Girl* is a study of a famous contemporary character named Moll Cutpurse, who appears in this play as a large-hearted roysterer donning men's clothes, and talking thieves' cant, yet shunning evil communications, and playing the good providence of the piece.

The plays of Thomas Middleton (1570-1627) fall into two Middle-  
 main classes—the realistic and romantic. To the first of these ton.  
 belong the series of rollicking comedies dealing with contemporary London manners, of which the earliest is *Blurt, Master Constable* (1602), and two most spirited are *A Trick to Catch the Old One* (1606) and *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* (1612). The latter is as lively a piece of work as is to be found in any of Shakespeare's dramatic contemporaries; but for more than one reason its plot cannot be described here. Middleton's comic characters belong to the same world as Jonson's, but their portrayal is more photographic, less universal, and less great. Finer work of Middleton's was done in collaboration with William Rowley (1585 ?-1642 ?); the partnership seems to have been equally beneficial to both playwrights. Their greatest drama is undoubtedly *The Changeling* (1623), in which the heroine, Beatrice Joanna, is claimed as his prey, in a scene of enthralling power, by the desperado De Flores, whom she has hired to dispatch her destined husband and thus

—as she had hoped—to secure for her the man of her heart. Of De Flores' character Leigh Hunt wrote that 'for effect at once tragical, probable, and poetical, it surpasses anything I know of in the drama of domestic life'. Hardly less powerful are certain scenes of *The Mayor of Queenborough* (1596), a play with a setting in early British legend. *A Fair Quarrel* (1617) is a moving domestic drama in which a mother strives to prevent a son from fighting a duel in defence of her honour by falsely informing him that the charge against her is true. On a somewhat lower footing stands the tragi-comedy *The Spanish Gipsy* (1623). The most powerful tragedy of Middleton's unaided hand is *Women beware Women* (1612), which portrays the fate of a historical character, the notorious Bianca Capello. His remarkable political drama, *A Game at Chess* (1624), has been described by Swinburne as 'the only work of English poetry which may properly be called Aristophanic'. There is fine work in *The Witch*, which stands in a curious relation to Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. The best play of Rowley, working singly, is the powerful *All's Lost by Lust*.

Heywood.

Thomas Heywood (1572-1648?) has been called by Lamb the prose Shakespeare: present-day criticism would be inclined to lay more emphasis on the adjective than on the substantive. According to his own account, Heywood had a hand in no less than two hundred and twenty plays, of which over thirty survive. His early dramatic work includes the chronicle play in two parts, *King Edward IV* (1593-94); *If you know not me you know nobody* (1604-5), an unconvincing drama, also in two parts, on the early sufferings of Queen Elizabeth; and possibly *Nobody and Somebody* (1590), which takes for its hero the legendary British king Elidure. His next play, *A Woman Killed with Kindness* (1607), is his masterpiece, and the greatest surviving example of English domestic tragi-comedy. It deals with the seduction of a woman by the friend of her husband, who discovers the wrong and forbears to punish his wife. Her remorse brings her to her death, but before the end she begs and receives her husband's forgiveness. Heywood handles this difficult subject with tact and power, and imparts to the play, especially in the famous hawking scene, a delightful sense of English country life. In *The English Traveller* (printed 1633) a hardly less delicate subject is handled with almost equal success. Lacking Webster's intense imaginative power, and Dekker's gift of poetry, Heywood displays in these two plays, and to some extent in the rest, the rare power of being able to deal with fine emotional issues without ever falling into the slough of sentimentalism. *The Wise Women of Hogsdon*, with its well-constructed plot and interesting characters of contemporary English life, and *The Fair Maid of the West*, an English comedy with a romantic background of adventure, are the best of his remaining plays.

Webster.

The early dramatic work of John Webster (1580?-1625?) was written in collaboration with other men: his share in



*Westward Ho* and *Northward Ho* has been already noticed. The classical tragedy, *Appius and Virginia*, has been commonly attributed to him, though recent criticism<sup>1</sup> assigns it to Heywood. *A Cure for a Cuckold* (1617), *The Devil's Law Case* (1623), and a few other plays of less note are clearly from his hand. But his fame rests mainly upon his two great tragedies, *The White Devil* (1611?) and *The Duchess of Malfi* (1617?). The chief figure of *The White Devil* is the notorious Vittoria Corombona (historically Accoramboni), whose deeds and death had occurred during Webster's lifetime. Having urged her lover, Brachiano, to murder her husband, Camillo, and his own duchess Isabella, Vittoria marries him, and both eventually fall victims to the vengeance of Francisco de' Medici, Isabella's brother. Great power distinguishes the scene in which Vittoria stands her trial, and, like Helen before the elders of Troy, dazzles her judges by her beauty and brilliance. Flamineo, Vittoria's brother, is a tense study in evil. There is great power and terror in the scene where Cornelia, her mother, is shown maddened with grief for her murdered son, Marcello. An even greater play is *The Duchess of Malfi*, in which Webster depended on a theme supplied to him in Painter's *Palace of Pleasure*. The persecution of the Duchess by her brothers for having married the man of her heart, her murder at their order by the imaginative villain, Bosola, and his remorse and atonement, are described with intense tragic feeling, and the subtlest psychological sense. Webster's sinister imagination displays itself not only in the main features of plot and character, but in the unearthly images and haunting close-packed lines of poetry with which the two great tragedies abound. A strange beauty, matchable only in Donne, suffuses his most grim and sinister scenes; and those who read him closely and sympathetically will eventually agree with Swinburne and Symonds, that 'there is no poet morally nobler than Webster'.

Webster's plays, as has been seen, turn on revenge: the same motive predominates in *The Atheist's Tragedy* (1603?) and *The Revenger's Tragedy* (printed 1607), the two lurid dramas ascribed to the hand of Cyril Tourneur. Of these the first has the higher moral purpose, but the second, describing the vengeance taken by Vendice for the death of his sister, is incomparably greater in dramatic power. Both are full of horrors and evil passions, and represent an extreme variety of the 'Tragedy of Blood'.

Philip Massinger (1584-1640) revised Dekker's *Virgin Martyr* (1620) and collaborated with Fletcher in several tragedies—notably in *Thierry and Theodoret* (1617) and *The Double Marriage* (1620)—and with Field in *The Fatal Dowry* (1619?). The influence of Fletcher is evident in two of the three dramatic kinds which Massinger chiefly practised—romantic tragedy and romantic tragi-comedy. He has left

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Rupert Brooke, *John Webster*, p. 161 seq.

four important, if not great, tragedies—*The Unnatural Combat* (1621), of which the subject is akin to that of Shelley's *Cenci*, and may have come from the same source; *The Duke of Milan* (1623), a transposition of the story of Herod and Marianne to an Italian setting; *The Roman Actor* (1626), dealing with the fate incurred by the actor Paris, owing to the infatuation felt for him by Domitian's mistress; and *Believe as You List* (1630), which under a classical disguise refers to a famous event of recent Spanish history.

His best tragi-comedies are *The Maid of Honour* (1622 ?), *The Great Duke of Florence* (1627), and *The Bashful Lover* (1635). The first and second of these are noteworthy as containing respectively his two most charming heroines, Camiola and Lidia. The chief qualities displayed by Massinger in his more serious plays are great ethical earnestness, a gift of admirable and easy-flowing, if seldom very intense, blank verse, and a mastery of rhetoric which at its best is moving and splendid, but constantly loses itself in wholly unnecessary verbosity. This latter defect apart, he had a keen sense of the theatre and fine constructive power. The influence of Jonson and Middleton is evident in his two admirable comedies—*The City Madam* (1619) and *A New Way to Pay Old Debts* (1625). *A New Way* contains the most famous, and perhaps the greatest, of all his characters, Sir Giles Overreach, the merciless usurer, whose machinations form the subject of a powerful and capitably sustained plot. The voracious Mr. Justice Greedy recurs amusingly throughout the play, and a charming theme is supplied by the relations between the good-hearted spendthrift, Wellborn, and his friend and benefactress, Lady Allworth.

Beaumont  
and  
Fletcher.

John Fletcher (1579–1625) and Francis Beaumont (1584–1616) represent the rare union of two men who were complementary to one another no less in genius than in friendship. We are told that they lived together and had all things in common; and we may well imagine that they carried this friendship into the realm of the mind, and that here too mutual trust and community prevailed from the day when, according to received accounts, they first collaborated in *Philaster* (1608 ?) till 1616, the year which saw the death of Beaumont—and of Shakespeare. Little weight is now attached to Pope's statement that Beaumont's share in this partnership was chiefly confined to criticism and moderation of Fletcher's more original and exuberant genius: indeed, the best modern criticism holds that in many essentials Beaumont was the higher and more powerful genius of the pair. Few modern authorities, moreover, share the disability of Coleridge 'to distinguish the presence of Fletcher during the life of Beaumont, or the absence of Beaumont during the life of Fletcher'. *Bonduca* (1616) and *Valentinian* (1617), which represent Fletcher's later work in tragedy at its highest, show essential differences, both of technique and feeling, from the best work in tragedy and tragi-comedy of the collaboration, *Philaster*,



*The Maid's Tragedy* (1609), and *A King and No King* (1611). A comparison between these or similar groups enables us to disengage Beaumont's qualities and a similar *experimentum crucis* may be made by comparing the two plays in *Four Plays in One* (1608) which are undoubtedly Beaumont's, with the two plays which are undoubtedly Fletcher's. The comparison indicates that Beaumont had a graver and more tragic gift, and a finer and more Shakespearean sense of character than Fletcher; and it also tends to prove that where the two were writing together, it was Beaumont rather than Fletcher who took the lead. Similarly, Beaumont's humour has a stronger and more Jonsonian fibre than Fletcher's; and Fletcher's blank verse, rich in feminine endings, and constantly end-stopped, is at once lighter and less flexible than Beaumont's more impressive line, which avoids redundant syllables and runs freely, yet not loosely, into periods. In invention, however, and in dialogue, Fletcher's was the lighter and more flexible mind. 'The genius of Beaumont', says Swinburne, 'was deeper, sweeter, nobler than his elder's: the genius of Fletcher more supple, more prodigal, and more voluble than his friend's.'

Two early comedies, *The Woman Hater* (1606) and *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (1610?), are now attributed mainly, if not wholly, to Beaumont. Both illustrate his tendency to burlesque, which in the latter play is directed against the romantic extravagances of such plays as Heywood's *Four Prentices*. The mock-heroic adventures of the prentice, Ralph, who plays the chief part before a stage audience including his master and mistress, are inimitably funny. Such comedies of Fletcher as may be assigned to the period before the collaboration deal mainly with contemporary London life, and are markedly Middletonian in quality.

To the joint authorship of Beaumont and Fletcher seven plays have been confidently assigned by recent authorities, and a few others with less confidence. Though the collaboration produced more than one comedy, its finest results were reached in tragedy and tragic-comedy. In the first kind the masterpiece was *The Maid's Tragedy*, in which the contrasted themes of love, friendship, and loyalty to a sovereign, are handled in such a way as to precipitate the true tragic conflict, culminating in tragic disaster. *Philaster*, though it possesses tragic elements, reaches a less tragic ending. Its chief themes are the suspicion entertained by Philaster for his high-born sweetheart, Arethusa, the infatuation felt for him by the maiden Euphrasia, and the ruse by which she disguises herself as a page and enters his service, and is eventually preferred to the service of her rival. *A King and No King*, the main theme of which is not as repulsive as it has often been declared to be, is remarkable for the braggart soldier, Bessus, a worthy comrade of Bobadil and Parolles. These three plays contain much splendid poetry, and are developed with constructive

skill, psychological insight, and a keen sense of tragic issues : yet for all their power they fall short, both in freedom and intensity, of the highest tragic work of Shakespeare and Webster.

Fletcher  
and Mas-  
singer.

The vexed and intricate question of Fletcher's collaboration with Massinger has already been touched on : the precise share of each in such dramas as *The False One* and *The Beggar's Bush* cannot be discussed here. Massinger's hand has been traced in many plays commonly attributed to Fletcher alone—especially in such later tragedies as *Thierry and Theodoret*, *The Propheetess*, and *The Double Marriage*. Two of the finest tragedies attributed to Fletcher's unaided authorship are *Bonduca* and *Valentinian*. The first takes its theme from ancient British history, and combines the stories of Boadicea and Caractacus in a finely handled plot. Most moving are the passages describing the character and death of the heroic youth Hengo. *Valentinian* contains some of Fletcher's most typical work : it develops in free and graceful poetry the conspiracy of the wronged husband, Maximus, against the libidinous tyrant Valentinian. Among the best of Fletcher's tragi-comedies are *The Loyal Subject* (1619 ?)—which reverts to the theme of *The Maid's Tragedy* and *Valentinian*—and *The Knight of Malta* (1620 ?), a drama of chivalry, containing in the high-souled Oriana one of his most finely drawn women.

Fletcher's  
Comedies.

Fletcher has left many comedies of manners with an English or foreign setting. Among the best of these are *The Little French Lawyer* (1619), *The Wild Goose Chase* (1621), and his two comedies of London life, *Monsieur Thomas* (1611 ?) and *Wit Without Money* (1614). *Monsieur Thomas*, which has not had its dues from modern criticism, is one of the most amusing plays of the period : it deals with a lively young man who pretends to be a prig in order to please his sweetheart, and appears in this guise to his disgusted father, whose pet ambition had been that his son should become an accomplished rake. A place apart in Fletcher's plays must be given to the charming pastoral romance, *The Faithful Shepherdess* (1608), which is lit with some of his most exquisite poetry. His splendid lyric gifts, his workmanlike and efficient faculty of blank verse, and the masterly ease and freedom with which he handles both plot and character, are among Fletcher's highest dramatic qualities. It must be admitted, however, that if his characterization is masterly in its kind, that kind is some way below the highest, and that he constantly forces human nature out of its true mean into violent and unnatural contrasts. The virtue of his maidens is constantly felt to be strained and artificial. They protest too much, and their chastity is strangely interwoven with prurience. Conversely, many of his villains and their villainies are unauthentic and altogether 'too steep'. The interest they inspire seems too often due rather to adroit manipulation than to the profound intuition of genius. Fletcher's great gifts of wit and humour may be praised with



less reserve. The one gift which he has never been denied is cleverness. We may call him a playwright of the decadence, provided it be understood that decadence is a totally different thing from weakness.

To the decadence, too, if the word be accepted with this reservation, belongs John Ford (1586–1640). He is said to have had part in sixteen plays, four of which were destroyed in manuscript by Warburton's cook. In two other lost plays, and in the extant *Sun's Darling*, he collaborated with Dekker. His part in *The Witch of Edmonton* has been already noticed. The loss of *A Late Murder of the Son upon the Mother*, by Ford and Webster, dealing, like *Arden of Feversham* and *The Yorkshire Tragedy*, with a murder-case of contemporary life, is greatly to be regretted. The power and terror which would have resulted from such a combination on such a theme may easily be imagined. Ford's two romantic comedies, *The Fancies* (1635?) and *The Lady's Trial* (1638), are now little read; the latter has been generally underrated, and is an admirable piece of work. Merit of a different and more reflective order attaches to his youthful tragi-comedy, *The Lover's Melancholy* (1628). But his fame depends ultimately on his three tragedies, *Love's Sacrifice*, *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* (both printed 1633), and *The Broken Heart* (1629?), and on his interesting and thoroughly well-made history play, *Perkin Warbeck* (1633). The first of these displays, not very convincingly, passion foiled of its actual consummation, yet virtually triumphant, even in death, over honour and fidelity. The second develops sympathetically, and with great power, a theme of passion declared by Shelley to be 'a very poetical subject', yet generally avoided in modern literature, or else handled as by Shelley in *The Cenci*, after such a fashion as to cause horror and repulsion. In *The Broken Heart*, passion is again dominant over all else in life and death: if its manifestation is more normal than in the preceding play, the episodes to which it leads are developed with the melodramatic sensationalism always dear to Ford. In *'Tis Pity*, this manifests itself in the scene where Giovanni rushes into his father's presence with the heart of his murdered sister on a dagger. In *The Broken Heart* it takes very effective form in the scene where Calantha, dancing on the eve of her nuptials, is told successively of the deaths of her father, Penthea, and her betrothed, yet dances on to the end while she plots her own doom.

Ford's sensationalism, his love of forbidden themes, and his ethical antinomianism are commonly cited to his disadvantage; but they seem inseparable from the less dubious qualities of his genius—the intensity of imagination, the poignant sense of tragic fate, the exquisite and subtle intuition of character, which to all who have felt the meaning of life or literature give him a place very little below the highest.

James Shirley (1596–1666) wrote for the Irish as well as for Shirley.

the English stage, from 1625 till the closing of the theatres in 1642. During this period he produced forty plays, nearly all of which are extant. His three finest tragedies, *The Traitor*, (1631), *Love's Cruelty* (1631), and *The Cardinal* (1641), are romantic in theme and setting, and the first and the last fall little below the best tragedies of Beaumont and Fletcher, or even of Webster. Shirley was a most capable craftsman, with a gift of easy and often beautiful blank verse. *The Traitor* is a masterpiece of construction, and some of Shirley's finest characterization has gone to the drawing of the ambitious villain, Lorenzo, his brother, the libidinous Duke, and Lorenzo's fiery and chivalrous dupe, Sciarrha. *The Cardinal*, which is reminiscent of *The Duchess of Malfi*, is on a slightly lower plane. In romantic comedy or tragi-comedy Shirley's chief successes are perhaps *The Brothers* (1626) and *The Imposture* (1640). More generally read, and more readable, are his comedies of manners. In *The Witty Fair One* (1628) the complicated yet never tedious intrigue centring round the loves of Aimwell and Violetta, and the 'humours' of the 'gull' Sir Nicholas Treddle and his tutor, once more display Shirley as a thoroughly capable craftsman. *Hyde Park* (1632) is equally well made, and its interest is enhanced for modern readers by the vivid scenes portraying<sup>1</sup> horse-racing and foot-racing within the Park's precincts. *The Lady of Pleasure* (1635) is a brisk and interesting comedy, showing how Sir Thomas Bornwell cures his wife of extravagance by outdoing her in that vice. This play supplies some curious and particular information as to the costumes, male and female, of the period. Shirley's late masque, *The Contention of Ajax and Ulysses* (1640), contains the exquisite lyric, 'The glories of our blood and state'. If his plays lack the intensity necessary to the highest drama, they have a peculiar charm for the discerning, owing to their ease, finish, and deliberate and self-conscious literary quality.

Minor  
Play-  
wrights.

The minor dramatists of the period can only be briefly mentioned here. Robert Armin, actor and playwright, lives by one drama, *The Two Maids of Mortlake* (printed 1609), and the lawyer, Edward Sharpham, by two, *The Fleire* (1606) and *Cupid's Whirligig* (1607). Ludowick Barry's single play, *Ram Alley* (1609), deals racily and coarsely with some very queer characters living between Fleet Street and the Temple. Joshua Cooke's lively comedy, *Greene's Tu Quoque*, or *The City Gallant*, owed its name and much of its contemporary popularity to the acting of the celebrated comedian, Thomas Greene. Robert Tailor's *The Hog hath lost his Pearl* (1613) is an indifferent comedy which was acted by prentices and suppressed as satirizing the Lord Mayor of London. A more important name is that of John Day, who collaborated in several dramas, and wrote alone the charming little poetic dialogue, *The*

<sup>1</sup> After the Restoration real race-horses were brought upon the stage in this play.



*Parliament of Bees* (1641). His best plays are *The Isle of Gulls* (1605), a fresh and charming romantic comedy, reminiscent of Shakespeare and Lyly; and the hardly less successful *Humour out of Breath* (1608) and *Law Tricks* (1608). The 'sons of Ben', Jonson's protégés and disciples, include several playwrights of note. Nathaniel Field and Richard Brome were actually his apprentices in playwriting. Field has left two clever but very complicated comedies, *A Woman is a Weathercock* and *Amends for Ladies* (both about 1611). Fifteen of Brome's plays are extant; the best of these are comedies of contemporary 'humours' or manners, such as *The City Wit* (1629), *The Northern Lass* (1632), and *The Sparagus Garden* (1635). *The Jovial Crew* (1641) is a charming romantic drama turning on the pleasures and pathos of a vagabond life. Another 'son', though not a pupil, of Jonson's, was the brilliant and short-lived Thomas Randolph (1605–1635), who wrote several witty, though artificial comedies, including *The Conceited Pedlar* (1630), *The Jealous Lovers* (1632), and *The Muses' Looking-Glass* (1634).

Sir John Suckling (1609–1642) has left two serious dramas, *Aglaura* (1637) and the greatly superior *Brennoralt* (1639); and a sprightly comedy, *The Goblins* (1638). His dramatic capacity is not great, but his lyric gift redeems many of his pages from dullness, presenting, for instance, the much-enduring reader of *Aglaura* with such a *trouville* as 'Why so pale and wan, fond lover?' Suckling's friend, Shakerley Marmion (1603–1639) has left us, besides the poem *Cupid and Psyche*, three rather mediocre comedies, Jonsonian in colouring, of which the best known is *The Antiquary* (1636). Jonson's influence is also evident in *The Ordinary* (1634), the single comedy of William Cartwright. A much more lively play is *The City Match* (1639) by Cartwright's friend, Jasper Mayne. Other comedies of varying merit are *The Old Couple* (1619?) by Thomas May; *Covent Garden* (1632) and *Tottenham Court* (1633) by Thomas Nabbes—'a weaker Brome'; and *The City Nightcap* (1624) and *A New Trick to Cheat the Devil*, by Robert Davenport. The best of the three comedies left by Sir Aston Cockayne is *The Obstinate Lady* (1638?). *Albertus Wallenstein* (1639), by Henry Glapthorne, is chiefly remarkable as illustrating the fashion in which the Elizabethan playwright occasionally dramatized recent happenings in foreign history and presented them to his audience, who apparently in many cases became thus acquainted with their details for the first time. The best of Glapthorne's comedies, such as they are, is undoubtedly *Wit in a Constable* (1639). The dramatic work of Ludowick Carlell and the Duke of Newcastle does not merit mention here. That of William Davenant will be held over to a future chapter.

## CHAPTER XIV

## ELIZABETHAN AND JACOBEAN POETRY

The Beginnings: Wyatt and Surrey to Sackville — Spenser — The Elizabethan Sonnet — Daniel, Drayton, Breton, Wotton, Davies, Browne, Wither, the Fletchers, Jonson, Donne, Drummond, Campion.

OWING to causes which have been already outlined in this volume, there had been prosodic uncertainty in English poetry from the day of Lydgate to that of Skelton, Hawes, and Barclay, and where prosody is uncertain, poetry can never be great. From this condition English verse was rescued by an influence which had already stood it in good stead, the Italian. Though help was given by many other metres, the form which played the greatest part in the new development was one hitherto unpractised in England, the sonnet. The spread of the Italian influence was due to one man in especial, Sir Thomas Wyatt (1503–1542), who in his early manhood visited Italy and Spain on diplomatic missions, had met in the former country the famous Baldassare Castiglione, and had been strongly influenced by his courtly manual, *Il Cortegiano*. It was in Italy, too, that Wyatt had studied the poetry of Petrarch. As a result he brought the sonnet into England, and practised a form of it differing only from the Petrarchan model in having a rhyming couplet at the close. The sonnet form, through its strictness and conciseness, was to become an admirable corrective to the prosodic lawlessness of the day. Wyatt has left thirty-one sonnets in all, the greater number of which are either translated or adapted from foreign models. He practised many other metres, including rime royal, the rondeau, ‘Skeltonics’, the octosyllabic couplet, and ‘poulter’s measure’—a combination of the Alexandrine and the ‘fourteener’—and it is, perhaps, rather in these than in his sonnets that he shows the natural force that was in him. His poems, and especially those written in his longer metres, display the faulty sense of rhythm characteristic of the age; for instance, he begins a sonnet thus :

Because I have thee still kept from lies and blame,  
And to my power always have I thee honoured,  
Unkind tongue ! right ill hast thou me rendered.

Yet Wyatt at his best shows himself to be much more than a stumbling pioneer of new metres. Some of his love poems have true passion; and his fine lyric gift appears in his famous ‘Forget Not Yet’, and in the less known, but hardly inferior, ‘What Should I Say?’ His three satires addressed to John Poyntz and Sir Francis Bryan have a vigorous and manly ring.

Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey (1517–1547), had less natural vigour than his friend and mentor, Wyatt, but a far

Wyatt.

Surrey.



finer sense of poetic form. His superiority in this respect may be gathered from a comparison of the two men's versions of Petrarch's sonnet, 'Amor, che nel pensier mio vive e regna'. Surrey saw, what Wyatt had not seen, that the alteration in the language since Chaucer's day necessitated a corresponding variation of poetic rhythm, and he managed that variation with skill and understanding. For this reason he may well be called the first of modern English poets. He departed, moreover, from the practice of Wyatt by deserting the Petrarchan sonnet structure, and devising a form, consisting of three independent quatrains and a concluding couplet, which was extensively practised by Elizabethan sonneteers, and was transfigured in the practice of Shakespeare. Surrey used most of Wyatt's metres, and, like Wyatt, drew largely on foreign sources both for his themes and language; but despite all debts, the man's own courtly and chivalrous nature finds free play in his verse, and especially in those of his love poems which are addressed to his 'Fair Geraldine'. A good deal has been written, considerably beside the point, in the attempt to disprove his attachment to this lady, who was Elizabeth Fitzgerald, daughter of the ninth Earl of Kildare. It is certain that even if he was not her lover in the full sense of the word, he was her knight, chosen and favoured after the romantic fashion prescribed by the mediaeval Courts of Love. To her is addressed the well-known sonnet:

From Tuscan came my Lady's worthy race,  
Fair Florence was sometime her ancient seat,  
The Western Isle, whose pleasant shore doth face  
Wild Camber's cliffs, first gave her lively heat.

But Surrey's most personal and moving poem is his *Elegy on the Duke of Richmond*, written while he was in captivity at Windsor, awaiting his execution and musing on the happy past. It has been well said that in these verses 'we seem to be listening to a lament over the chivalry that is passing out of the order of the modern world'.

If Wyatt gave the sonnet to English poetry, it is indebted to Surrey for a yet more precious gift—blank verse, which he used for his translation of the Second and Fourth Books of Virgil's *Aeneid*. His choice of this metre was apparently dictated in part by the dislike of rhyme so common during the Renaissance, in part by his desire to devise a line which, with due allowance for the genius of the English language, should correspond with the Virgilian hexameter. It is probable that his immediate model was Molza's rhymeless translation of Virgil, published in Venice in 1541.<sup>1</sup> It is unlikely that blank verse had been consciously used before Surrey's time by any English poet. It is difficult to exaggerate the importance of an innovation which prepared the way for Marlowe, Shakespeare, and Milton.

<sup>1</sup> See W. J. Courthope, *History of English Poetry*, vol. ii, p. 96

Miscel-  
lanies and  
Minor  
Poets.

The poems both of Wyatt and Surrey originally saw the light in *Tottel's Miscellany* (1557), a verse collection compiled from the work of several contemporary poets. Such collections were frequent at the day; the most important of them, after Tottel, were *The Miscellany*, *The Paradise of Dainty Devices*, *England's Helicon*, *England's Parnassus*, and *The Poetical Rhapsody*. After Wyatt and Surrey, the two most important contributors to Tottel were Lord Vaux, a straightforward and vigorous writer, who dealt chiefly in chivalrous and religious themes; and Nicholas Grimald, a scholarly but uninspired versifier. *The Paradise of Dainty Devices* was compiled by the Court playwright, Richard Edwards, and published after his death. It includes contributions by Edwards's fellow-playwright, William Hunnis, by Sidney's friend, Fulke Greville, and by a certain 'W. R.', who may be Walter Raleigh.

In this connexion may be mentioned a number of minor poets, some of whom were represented in the different Miscellanies. Many of these were strongly influenced by Surrey. Thomas Churchyard (1520-1604), after soldiering in France and Scotland, took up the career of a writing man, and published several volumes of verse—among others the quaintly named *Churchyard's Chips*. He also translated from Ovid, and contributed a tragedy of *Jane Shore* to the *Mirror for Magistrates*. Barnabe Googe (1540-1594), in his *Eclogues*, *Epitaphs*, and *Songs* (1563), used the pastoral form without distinction, yet in such a fashion as to prepare the way for Spenser. George Turberville (1540 ?-1610) translated from Ovid and Mantuan, and in his *Epitaphs*, *Epigrams*, *Songs*, and *Sonnets* (1567) showed himself to have been strongly influenced by Wyatt and Surrey. Somewhat apart from these stands Thomas Tusser (1515-1580), a scholar who took to farming, and in 1573 published his *Five Hundred Points of Good Husbandry*, a quaint and frequently lively treatise on English country life, written in jumpy anapaests.

Gascoigne. A truer poet than any of these was George Gascoigne (1525 ?-1577), a university man of good family, who had had experience of warfare and diplomacy, and wrote in several different kinds. His dramatic and critical work is noticed elsewhere. His poems were originally published, together with other work, in 1573, under circumstances of some mystery. In 1575 he reissued them with certain alterations and additions and omissions, as *The Poesies of George Gascoigne*. The most valuable part of this collection was the lyric poetry, and especially that section of it which is entitled *The Flowers*. This includes such charming poems as 'Gascoigne's Good-morrow' and 'The Lovers' Lullaby', in which he combines great sweetness of utterance with complete technical mastery. Gascoigne uses many metres, and in all of them shows skilful craftsmanship. His *Dulce Bellum Inexpertis* is written in rime royal: it tells of his martial experiences with an easy rough-



and-ready realism. His *Don Bartholomew of Bath* describes his early love adventures: he subsequently repented of these, and, like Greene, wrote several prose tracts with a moral purpose. His changed attitude towards life is evident in his verse satire, *The Steel Glass*, which arraigns many features of English life, and has a good deal in common with *Piers the Plowman*, to which it makes several references. Gascoigne was a true, though not a great, poet, and in view of the numerous literary kinds in which he worked, he may perhaps be ranked with Drayton as a typical Elizabethan man of letters.

A greater than Gascoigne, however, is Thomas Sackville (1536-1608), afterwards Lord Buckhurst and Earl of Dorset, who contributed an *Induction* and *The Complaint of the Duke of Buckingham* to *The Mirror for Magistrates*, a huge collection of tragic tales in verse, written by various hands and published in several editions or instalments between 1555 and 1610. This work consists entirely of stories from English history, legendary or real, extending from the mythical Albanact to Elizabeth herself. Its original projectors were two Oxford men, William Baldwin and George Ferrers: its subsequent editors were John Higgins and Thomas Blennerhasset. Among the contributors, besides the men just mentioned, were John Skelton, Thomas Churchyard, and Thomas Phaer. The contributors' chief sources were, for the legendary part, Geoffrey of Monmouth, and for the historical, the chronicles of Hall and Fabyan. The work was intended as a continuation of Lydgate's *Falls of Princes*, itself an adaptation from Boccaccio. Its object was partly to teach history—or what was conceived to be history—in the form of poetry, partly, as Baldwin indicates, to induce rulers to take warning from the terrible examples cited. It is not possible here to discuss further the collection's complicated history and elaborate contents, but apart from the work of its greatest contributor, it has a certain importance owing to the stimulus it gave to the historical play and the historical poem during the Elizabethan period.

Sackville  
and *The  
Mirror for  
Magis-  
trates.*

The only poetry of first-rate quality which it contains is that of Sackville. His metre was rime royal, the great measure which had been used to such purpose by Chaucer, and James I of Scotland, and Henryson. This he adapts with perfect mastery to the new laws which the English language had evolved since the day of these poets. But his mastery of metre goes far beyond such merely adaptive skill: his stanza has a rhythm and a majesty which none save the great poets achieve. He wields it with the superb power which Spenser was to impart to his own great measure. Spenserian, too, is Sackville's use of allegory throughout *The Induction*, his dissociation of it from merely didactic ends, and his magical fusion of it with perfect poetry. His conception of Hell and its terrors has a classical largeness and a Dantesque

intensity. His mighty vision and rhythm are already evident in the opening description of Winter, and are sustained throughout the scenes where he is shown walking with Sorrow for guide, till the close, at which the broken Buckingham prepares to 'pour out his soul in despair. No poem was ever more surely conceived in the grand style than the *Induction*.

Spenser.

There is every promise that if Sackville's achievement had been more considerable, his would have been one of the greatest names in English poetry. With fuller leisure for production, Edmund Spenser (1552-1599) has left work sufficient in volume and quality to give him place as the greatest poet since Chaucer. In appraising his work we must not forget that the age, as far as English poetry was concerned, was one of beginnings, or at least of recommencements, and that no high and unbroken literary tradition existed to help the poet to perfection. In 1569 Spenser matriculated at Cambridge and in poetry, his first verse consisting of translations of Petrarch and du Bellay. At Cambridge he came under two main influences, the Puritanical and the Platonic, between which, as the theological history of the time shows, a stronger analogy existed than might at first appear. Both took strong hold on his sensitive and impressionable nature, and both are strongly reflected in his subsequent poetry. Renaissance humanism had made him familiar with the Platonic theory of ideas, and with the conception of God as the Master Craftsman. The result is splendidly evident in his two youthful *Hymns in Honour of Love and of Beauty*:

His Early  
Writings  
and Life.

What time this world's great Workmaster did cast  
To make all things, such as we now behold:  
It seems that he before his eyes had placed  
A goodly pattern, to whose perfect mould  
He fashioned them as comely as He could,  
That now so fair and seemly they appear,  
As nought may be amended anywhere.

That wondrous pattern, whereso'er it be,  
Whether in earth laid up in secret store,  
Or else in heaven, that no man may it see  
With sinful eyes, for fear it to defore,  
Is perfect Beauty, which all men adore.

His Puritanism was probably not the extreme form advocated by Cartwright, but the milder persuasion of Grindal, the head of his college, whom he afterwards portrays with affection as Algrind in *The Shepherd's Calendar*. An even more powerful personal influence was that of Gabriel Harvey, Fellow of Pembroke, the 'Hobbinol' of *The Shepherd's Calendar*. Harvey's behaviour was often that of a truculent pedant, but he was a man of genuine intellectual power, and a true friend of Spenser, who always showed the strongest regard for him. As has been elsewhere shown, he was an enemy to rhyme, and a champion of rhymeless classical metre. Mainly



owing to his influence Spenser attempted for a while, with small success, to write English poetry in Latin feet.

Within three years after leaving Cambridge Spenser had entered the service of the Earl of Leicester, and had become an inmate of his household. This experience resulted in his friendship with Leicester's nephew, Sir Philip Sidney, and had a profound effect on his life and poetry. He was now the favourite of England's greatest courtier, and the friend of its truest and most accomplished gentleman. The glamour of a great ambition greatly pursued invested the personality of Leicester. All the chivalry of the past age, all the accomplishment and courtesy of the present, all the golden promise of the future, seemed incarnate in Sidney. By both men was the sensitive young poet attracted, but especially by the latter, in whom he saw nobility of soul united with charm and genius. Henceforth Sidney, both before and after his heroic death, was a constant theme of Spenser's praise. His earliest considerable work, *The Shepherd's Calendar*, was dedicated to this 'president of nobleness and chivalry'. Later, the poet's admiration and love of his 'Astrophel' recur in *The Ruins of Time* and *The Tears of the Muses*, and help to sweeten the bitterness of *Mother Hubbard's Tale*. But Sidney's character played a still greater part in Spenser's work, for it profoundly influenced his conception of *The Faerie Queene*. Spenser's correspondence with Gabriel Harvey shows that some part of this poem was finished as early as 1580.

The previous year had seen the completion of *The Shepherd's Calendar*. This consisted of twelve eclogues, one for each month of the year, composed in various metres, including the heroic couplet and six-lined and eight-lined stanzas. It was accompanied by a prose commentary, from the hand of one 'E. K.' who may almost certainly be identified with Edward Kirk, a Cambridge friend and fellow-student of Spenser's. In developing his *Calendar*, Spenser owes much to the pastoral poets of antiquity, and of modern France, Italy, and England. Theocritus and Virgil had already used the pastoral as a theme of love: Spenser pursues this theme in more than one of his Eclogues, and incidentally tells the tale of his own hopeless passion for Rosalynd, 'the widow's daughter of the glen'. The practice of other poets, notably Petrarch, Mantuan, and Barclay, supplied other themes, some of which hardly promised the highest poetry.<sup>1</sup> Such poetry, it must be admitted, is

*The Shepherd's  
Calendar.*

<sup>1</sup> Professor Courthope has shown (*History of English Poetry*, vol. ii, p. 244) that in Spenser's reflections on the faults of the Roman Catholic and Anglican clergy, he had been anticipated by Mantuan on the one hand, and by Gooze on the other; while Barclay, by his praises of Archbishop Morton in the character of a shepherd, furnished him with the idea of complimenting his old patron, Grindal, and with the idea of giving the rustic names Morell and Ruffin to the contemporary Bishops Elmore and Young. From Marot he borrowed the motive of the dirge in the eleventh Eclogue, and the elegy or complaint of the twelfth.

seldom to be found in the *Eclogues*: yet they contain numerous passages of most pleasing fancy, and the technical mastery which had already been displayed in the two *Hymns* is seldom absent. Spenser combines the more usual themes of the pastoral with eulogies of his friends and patrons, and references to contemporary abuses in Church and State. These topics, despite their diversity, are brought into happy union beneath the pastoral convention. In *The Shepherd's Calendar* we meet for the first time that extravagant eulogy of Elizabeth which was to recur henceforth throughout all Spenser's poetry.

His  
shorter  
poems.

With the subsequent details of his life in Ireland and England we are not here concerned. In 1590, ten years after *The Shepherd's Calendar*, appeared the first three books of *The Faerie Queene*. The following three were not published till 1596. This represents all of the poem that Spenser actually wrote, with the exception of the splendid fragment on *Mutability* published ten years after his death. In 1591 he issued his early translations from du Bellay and Petrarch together with *The Ruins of Rome*, *Mother Hubbard's Tale*, *The Ruins of Time*, *Muopotmos*, and *The Tears of the Muses*. In 1595 he published his sonnet sequence, *Amoretti*, the *Epithalamium*, and *Colin Clout's Come Home Again*. In 1596 appeared his *Four Hymns*<sup>1</sup>; the *Prothalamium*, a poem commemorating the marriage of the two daughters of the Earl of Worcester; and *Daphnaida*, an elegy on the wife of his friend, Arthur Gorges. *The Ruins of Time* and *The Tears of the Muses* lament the decay of learning and the triumph of barbarism, and reflect Spenser's disappointment at his failure to secure the recognition which was his due. The first poem contains a famous passage on the death of Leicester. *Mother Hubbard's Tale of the Ape and the Fox* is an admirably managed satire in couplets on court abuses. It is relieved by a charming portrait of the perfect courtier, who is undoubtedly Sidney. The beautiful *Amoretti* sonnets are addressed to his wife. Their technical qualities will be noticed elsewhere. The *Epithalamium*, written to celebrate his own marriage, is a poem of high and passionate beauty. *Colin Clout's Come Home Again* is full of interest and charm: it describes his visit to the court under the guidance of Raleigh, 'the Shepherd of the Ocean', and records his impressions of the great ladies and courtiers and poets of the day.

The  
*Faerie  
Queene*.

If Spenser's work had closed with his minor poems his rank as a poet might have been the far from despicable one of Drayton or Daniel: his longest and greatest poem lifted him above them, and made him the second poet of his age. In a letter addressed to Raleigh in 1590, he declared his aim in writing *The Faerie Queene*. The poem, he says, is 'a continued allegory or dark conceit. King Arthur has been chosen as the hero owing to the glory of his fame and his

<sup>1</sup> Including the earlier two on Earthly Love and Beauty 'reformed' by two on Heavenly Love and Beauty.



remoteness from the envy and suspicion of the present time.' To justify his handling of his hero and the general structure of his poem, Spenser cites the precedents of Homer, Virgil, Ariosto, and Tasso. He states, moreover, that his book's object is 'to fashion a gentleman or noble person in virtuous and gentle discipline'. This profession reconciles his own chivalrous instinct with the current demand that art should have an ethical purpose. But he rejects with vigour the contention that the presence of such a purpose need, or should, make the poem didactic in form. Twelve books had been intended, each with its patron knight representing a specific virtue: 'the first of the Knight of the Red Cross, in whom I express Holiness: the second, of Sir Guyon, in whom I set forth Temperance: the third, of Britomartis, a Lady Knight, in whom I picture Chastity.' We have seen that only six books and a fragment were completed. The twelfth book was to have set forth the events occasioning the action of the poem. Spenser further tells us, 'In that Fairy Queen I mean Glory in my general intention: but in my particular I conceive the most excellent and gracious person of our sovereign, the Queen.'

A good deal has been written, hardly helpfully, as to the precise qualities on which the poem's greatness depends, and as to whether its central conception is really that professed by Spenser. There seems little difficulty in taking him strictly at his word when he declares in effect that he wishes to write of chivalry in order to help other men to its achievement. Such an aim, pursued not 'by way of precepts' but through allegory, and 'ensample', is no unfitting motive for a great poem. There is high spiritual purpose and achievement throughout *The Faerie Queene*, and we shall do it far less than justice if, with Hume and Lowell, we deny this, and limit its beauty to its poetic exquisiteness. It is first and foremost a poem written to the glory of a dying ideal, and of a man of Spenser's day who, in the strength of that ideal, had become the perfect knight. Of this glory Spenser tells in a form modelled in great measure on previous tradition and the practice of Ariosto, a form deficient, indeed, in technical unity, but nowise deficient in the higher unity of feeling, colour, and spirit. This sense of unity is heightened by the royal sweep and ease with which Spenser handles the great nine-line stanza of his own invention, and by the exquisite imagination which runs throughout the poem, and constantly suffuses its scenes and images with perfect beauty. The archaism of language for which Jonson blamed Spenser, and which had certainly been used to excess in *The Shepherd's Calendar*, is here employed with finer art, and helps to produce a sense of happy remoteness from common things. Spenser's pictures of Acrasia's Bower of Bliss, the garden of Adonis, and Busirane's Masque of Cupid, are perfect in their sensuous beauty; a different power is evident in the Procession of the

Vices in the first Book, and the Procession of the Months in the final fragment. Sometimes Spenser's imagery is dark and tremendous, as Sackville's had been before him. Thus Duessa invokes Night :

O thou most ancient grandmother of all,  
More old than Jove whom thou at first didst breed,  
Or that great house of gods celestial  
Which wast begot in Demogorgon's hall,  
And saw'st the secrets of the world unmade.

More usual, perhaps, is the serener beauty of this :

The lily, lady of the flowering field,  
The flower de luce, her lovely paramour,  
Bid thee to them thy fruitless labours yield  
And soon leave off this toilsome weary stoure.  
Lo, lo, how brave she decks her bounteous bower  
With silken curtains and gold coverlets,  
Therein to shroud her sumptuous belamoure,  
Yet neither spins nor cards nor cares nor frets,  
But to her mother Nature all her care she lets

This passage illustrates at once the exquisiteness of Spenser's imagery, and the free and perfect music of his stanza. Both perfections are again evident here :

As a tall ship tossed in troublous seas,  
Whom raging winds, threatening to make the prey  
Of the rough rocks, do diversely disease,  
Meets two contrary billows by the way  
That her on either side do sore assay,  
And boast to swallow her in greedy grave,  
She, scorning both their sprites, does make wide way,  
And with her breast breaking the foamy wave  
Does ride on both their backs, and fair herself does save.

Spenser, 'the poets' poet', has had more homage from his successors than any English poet save Chaucer and Shakespeare. In his own day, men delighted to honour him and to take him for their model. Among modern poets Keats has probably felt his influence most strongly. A fine symbol of his genius is that of Wordsworth :

Sweet Spenser, moving through his clouded heaven  
With the Moon's beauty and the Moon's soft pace.

The Eliza-  
bethan  
Sonnet.

The sonnet form gained no immediate popularity in England after its acclimatization by Wyatt and Surrey. Spenser appears to have been the first Elizabethan to use it, as he published twenty-six sonnets adapted from French models as early as 1569. In 1582 Thomas Watson published *Hecatopathia* or *Passionate Century of Love*, a collection of so-called sonnets adapted from the Italian, and written chiefly in an eighteen-lined stanza. Watson, in the prose commentary which he appended to each of these poems, admits his borrowings, and indicates their sources. His confession—or what is virtually such—that his 'sonnets' were mere essays in versifi-



cation, may have been to some extent responsible for the extreme view that sonnets by other writers, in which borrowing occurs, are essays of this kind and nothing more. The question affects the whole group of Elizabethan sonneteers now to be discussed, including Shakespeare. Modern scholarship has shown that nearly all of these men took much of their language and imagery from foreign sources, and especially from Petrarch, and Ronsard, and their followers, notably du Bellay, Desportes, Pontus de Tyard, and Claude de Pontoux. Adaptations from the work of these poets have been traced in the work of practically every Elizabethan sonneteer. It is impossible here to discuss this debt in detail; but it must be remarked, firstly, that judicious adaptation of this kind was regarded at the period as a legitimate and even praiseworthy literary device, savouring in no sense of plagiarism; and, secondly, that such borrowing is no certain indication that the Elizabethan sonnet was a mere literary exercise, devoid of true passion and emotion. On the one hand it must be remembered that in very many sonnets there is no suggestion of borrowing; on the other, it may be freely admitted that much work of the minor men, and some work of the major, was written purely for literary practice. Yet they know little of either life or literature who would claim that the best sonnets of Shakespeare, Spenser, and Sidney, or even of Drayton and Daniel, were written mainly in this spirit. It is not, indeed, necessary, or possible, to interpret by reference to the actual facts of the sonneteer's life each allusion which he makes to his passion and suffering; much must be ascribed to imagination projecting itself into the emotions of others, much to the poet's desire to set forth his own emotions in a veiled and symbolic form. What seems certain is that in all the greatest cases the emotion is there, transcending and transfiguring the borrowed figures, and making the sonnet an authentic record of the poet's soul.

Such is undoubtedly the case with Sir Philip Sidney, whose sonnet-sequence, *Astrophel and Stella*,<sup>1</sup> with its interspersed lyrics, comprises the better part of his poetry. No sensitive intelligence can doubt that these poems, at their best, are inspired by genuine passion. We need not greatly concern ourselves as to how literally they refer to the lady to whom they were addressed, Penelope Devereux, daughter of the Earl of Essex. They are written in a form conforming mainly to the Petrarchan, but differing from this through the employment of the final couplet, which was to come into general use among Elizabethan sonneteers. The worst fault of Sidney's poetry is his use of uncouth and grotesque conceits; but his best sonnets—for example, the beautiful one on the Moon—show a mastery all the more remarkable in view of his early place among English sonneteers. The finest of the songs in this collection is perhaps 'Doubt you to whom the Muse these

Sidney's  
Sonnets.

<sup>1</sup> Written between 1580 and 1584, first published in 1591.

notes intendeth'. There is much pleasing, but little really exquisite, work among Sidney's miscellaneous lyrics, and those of his *Arcadia*.

Spenser's  
Sonnets.

Much that has been said of Sidney as a sonneteer applies to Spenser, in whose *Amoretti* there is the same free adaptation from foreign sources, and, at the poet's best, the same strong feeling, passing into the beauty of the sonnets 'Rudely thou wrongest my dear heart's desire' and 'Most glorious lord of life that on this day'. Spenser has left several fine sonnets outside this collection, among the best being one addressed to Gabriel Harvey. He employs a form midway between the strict Petrarchan and the free Shakespearean, connecting the first twelve lines of the sonnet with a chain of alternating rhymes, and concluding with the inevitable couplet.

Shakespeare's  
Sonnets.

Though several collections of Elizabethan sonnets preceded that of Shakespeare, we may leave these for the moment and pass directly to him from Spenser. His sonnets were first published in 1609; it is uncertain when they were written. Some writers, without good evidence, have assigned them to so early a date as 1594. Meres in 1598 refers to Shakespeare's 'sugared sonnets'; but it is quite possible that even at this date the collection was not complete. Probably the greater number were composed during the last three or four years of the sixteenth century. Similar uncertainty prevails regarding the chief persons who figure in them. These are a beautiful young man of gentle, if not noble, birth, whom the poet loved with deep affection; a second poet, rival of the first for the youth's patronage and friendship; and a dark woman, evil and not very beautiful, who had laid a spell upon the poet and corrupted his friend. The youth has been variously identified as Henry Wriothesley, third Earl of Southampton; William Herbert, Sidney's nephew and subsequently Earl of Pembroke; and a certain William Hughes. The probabilities point to Pembroke. The rival poet has been said by different writers to be Chapman, Daniel, Marston, Jonson, Drayton, and Barnabe Barnes. Regarding the dark lady's identity, nothing has been advanced save the wildest conjecture.

Even these sonnets of Shakespeare's have not escaped the imputation of being mere 'literary exercises'; but in this case the charge breaks down, almost ludicrously. We need not, indeed, regard them as autobiographical in all their details; we may admit all that is claimed regarding their debt to foreign and classical models; and it may be further admitted that certain of them have been built up on forced and conventional 'conceits'. But when all due discount has been made, it seems beyond doubt that the story they tell is based on a real experience of Shakespeare's soul. That experience is expressed in poetry which at its best has not been surpassed in the world's literature for beauty and passion. Love, joy, aspiration, disillusionment, jealousy, bitter self-reproach, hatred, and despair, have all passed into Shakespeare's song,



and have given it unparalleled fullness and intensity. And these emotions have found a music most apt to express their every change and nicety. The strict Petrarchan sonnet form, with its closely interlocked octave and regular three-rhymed sestet, had, as we have seen, been gradually supplanted and loosened by Sidney and Spenser. With Shakespeare the sonnet has won utterly free, for it now consists of three independent quatrains with the ringing or solemn couplet at the close. There are other ways of writing great sonnets than Shakespeare's way. Some of them may be fitter to express certain things which he did not attempt; but none is fitter for the themes of his choice; and it is difficult to think of him as giving forth his best in any form save one whose service is perfect freedom. The sonnet to which he has given his sovereign name is still, and always will be, among the great measures of English song.

Two other collections of sonnets, the *Delia* (1592) of Samuel Daniel, and the *Idea's Mirror* (1594) of Michael Drayton, reach a level lower indeed than Shakespeare's, but definitely above the average of their day. Daniel's sonnets, which do not represent his best work, are more polished than Drayton's, but Drayton's at their best have the greater natural force and fervour. Daniel is indebted to du Bellay and Desportes, Drayton to Claude de Pontoux; but in both cases, though less so in Daniel's, there is originality of handling and authenticity of feeling. In two of Daniel's finest sonnets, 'When men shall find thy flower, thy glory, pass', and the famous 'Care-charmer sleep', old conceits are handled with beauty and new meaning. The finest sonnet of Drayton is the famous 'Since there's no help', which has sometimes, without just cause, been attributed to Shakespeare. Beautiful, after a different fashion, is 'The glorious sun went blushing to his bed', with its delightful conclusion:

No cloud was seen, but crystalline the air,  
Laughing for joy upon my lovely fair.

The remaining work of these two poets will be considered later in this chapter.

The *Diana* (1592) of Henry Constable contains some admirably wrought sonnets, including the beautiful one addressed to Sir Philip Sidney's soul. Constable has also left a few songs, the most charming of which is 'Diaphenia like the daffadown dilly', Thomas Lodge's *Phyllis* (1593) contains some pleasing sonnets; but finer quality is evident in the songs interspersed throughout this collection and his remaining works. Few even of the Elizabethans have left anything more charming than his madrigal 'Love in my bosom like a bee'. Less perfect, but delightful in its way, is his lyric, 'My Phyllis hath the morning sun'. The *Parthenophil and Parthenope* of Barnabe Barnes contains madrigals and other lyrics, as well as a hundred and five sonnets. One of these,

Sonnets  
of Dray-  
ton and  
Daniel.

Lesser  
Sonnet-  
eers.

' Ah, sweet content, where is thy mild abode ? ' falls little, if at all, short of greatness. The chief remaining collections are *Licia* (1593), by Giles Fletcher, father of Phineas and the younger Giles ; *Coelia* (1594), by William Percy ; the anonymous *Zepheria* (1594) ; *Fidessa* (1596), by Bartholomew Griffin ; *Chloris* (1596), by William Smith ; and *Caelica*, a collection of sonnets and other lyrics by Fulke Greville, published in 1633, five years after their author's death. As a poet Greville is probably best known by the rare and quaint charm of his lyric, ' I with whose colours Myra dressed her head '. William Alexander, Earl of Stirling, published in 1604 his collection of sonnets and songs known as *Aurora*, but he is inferior as a poet to his friend, William Drummond of Hawthornden, whose natural lyric gift finds expression in several admirably wrought sonnets of love and religion.

The ' flowering-time ' of the Elizabethan sonnet, as has been pointed out by Sir Sidney Lee, was the period between 1591 and 1597. During these years there were published no fewer than twelve hundred love sonnets, to say nothing of other kinds. The fashion of sonnet writing waned as rapidly as that of ballade writing waned in the last decade of the nineteenth century. The amusing *Gulling Sonnets* (1595), in which Sir John Davies satirizes the fashion for sonneteering, show that the form had done its work for the time being, and had to make way for new varieties of verse.

We may here deal with a number of other poets, most of whom have left work in several different kinds. The sonnets, drama, and prose *Defence of Rhyme* of Samuel Daniel (1562-1619) have been mentioned elsewhere. The most elaborate of his remaining works is his *History of the Civil Wars* (1595-1609), a poem in eight books, of nine hundred stanzas each, on the Wars of the Roses. Its verse, though seldom rising to great heights, has the finish and distinction of all its author's more characteristic work. More highly wrought poetry is to be found in *The Complaint of Rosamond* (1592) and *Musophilus* (1599), a poem instinct with the love of learning and of England. In his capacity as Master of the Revels to James I, Daniel wrote several masques, including the charming *Hymen's Triumph*. His verse *Epistles* were addressed to various ladies and noblemen. In 1605 he published *Certain Small Poems*, the finest and best known of which is *Ulysses and the Siren*.

In his own day Daniel enjoyed a great reputation, which was largely justified by his high reflective vein, his enthusiasm for learning, and the silver beauty of his style ; but he lacked the natural force of Michael Drayton (1563-1631), with whom he is so often coupled. Drayton, especially in his sonnets and his *Barons' Wars*, shows marked traces of Daniel's influence. His *Idea's Mirror* and his plays have been already noticed. His most ambitious poem, *Polyolbion* (1613-22), is written in Alexandrine verse, and extends to thirty long books or

Daniel.

Drayton.



'songs'. It seems to have been suggested by *Albion's England* (1586), a long poem in which Thomas Warner had pursued the course of English history from the Flood to the execution of Mary Queen of Scots. *Polyolbion* is an itinerary of England, with interludes of history, fancy and fairy-lore, and reflects credit both on Drayton's determination and his patriotism. It is not to be expected that a work of this nature should achieve beauty and interest in all its parts; it is a high tribute to Drayton's genius that these qualities should be present as often as they are, and that his huge canvas should be constantly lit up with poetry. Drayton's historical poems include several 'legends' concerning famous characters; also *Mortimeriados* (1596), subsequently worked over and expanded into *The Barons' Wars* (1603); and *England's Heroical Epistles* (1597), which the poet conceives as having been written by certain romantic characters of history. These poems, though uneven, sometimes attain great beauty, as in *A Passion of King Henry and Fair Rosamond*, where the influence of Daniel is again strongly evident. Drayton also published *The Mooncalf* (1627), a satire, and *The Owl* (1604), an obscure satirical allegory or fable. His sacred poem, *The Harmony of the Church* (1591), is of negligible value. The patriotic impulse which impelled him to write *Polyolbion* flames out again in the stirring *Ballad of Agincourt*, and burns with a steadier glow in *The Ode to the Virginian Voyage*. His fairy poem, *Nymphidia*, is an inimitable blend of humour and fancy.

As early as 1593, in *The Shepherd's Garland* he had written pastoral poetry; but his happiest efforts in this kind were, strangely and pleasingly enough, reserved for his old age, which produced the perfect *Shepherd's Sirena* (1627) and the *Muses' Elysium* (1630). The *Nymphals* which make up this last collection are as full of poetry and freshness and charm as anything ever created by youth. Here the old man makes us known to 'Lirope the bright':

Some said a god did her beget,  
But much deceived were they:  
Her father was a Rivulet,  
Her mother was a Fay.

Later, a woodman tells us:

The Dryads, Hamadryads, the Satyrs and the Fawns  
Oft play at hide and seek before me on the lawns,  
The frisking fairy oft when horned Cynthia shines  
Before me as I walk dance wanton matachynes.

No little bubbling brook from any spring that falls  
But on the pebbles plays me pretty madrigals.

There were few kinds of literature extant in his day which Drayton<sup>1</sup> did not handle, and handle effectively. His mingled

<sup>1</sup> Professor Elton's short volume on Michael Drayton is indispensable to the student and may be read with pleasure by the general reader.

ruggedness and sweetness make him a curiously lovable figure.

Breton,  
Wotton,  
and  
others.

Nicholas Breton (1542–1626) has left several long poems, but his most charming work is to be found in the pastorals of *The Passionate Shepherd*. Richard Barnfield (1574–1626) published three volumes of scholarly and sometimes pleasing verse, but is known to the general by a single lyric, 'As it fell upon a day' ('Philomel'). The writings of Sir Henry Wotton (1568–1639) were published after his death, under the title *Reliquiae Wottoniae*. He is chiefly memorable here for a few lyrics, including the perfect 'Ye meaner beauties of the night'. Two writers of religious poetry were John Davies of Hereford (1565–1618) and the Jesuit priest, Robert Southwell (1560–1595). Davies' verse has small value; Southwell has left a long poem, *Saint Peter's Complaint* (1595), but his best work is contained in his shorter pieces, the most familiar of which is the finely symbolistic *Burning Babe*. A long poem in which philosophy and religion blend is *Nosce Teipsum* (1599) by Sir John Davies (1569–1626). This is a fervid affirmation of the worth and immortality of the soul, embodying the Platonism of the age, and often rising to great heights of beauty. The two quatrains beginning 'I know my soul hath power to know all things' are in all anthologies. The key-note of the poem is struck in these lines:

Sir John  
Davies.

Heaven waxeth old and all the spheres above  
Shall one day faint, and their swift motion stay,  
And Time itself in time shall cease to move;  
Only the soul survives and lives for aye.

Davies' work, though not great in volume, is curiously varied in kind. *Orchestra* (1596) celebrates the majesty of Dancing, 'the child of Music and of Love', and shows incidentally that earth, sun, moon, and stars, are all partners in a cosmic dance. This fancy, and the others which go to make the poem, are expressed in delightful language. There is much charm even in the series of acrostics—the *Hymns to Astraea* (1599)—which Davies addressed to Elizabeth.

Browne.

William Browne (1591–1643) was a self-confessed disciple of Spenser, whose praises he never ceased to sing. The sensuous charm of his best work is thoroughly Spenserian, and so is his delight in describing natural beauty. In 1613 Browne published the first book of *Britannia's Pastorals*, his best and best-known work. In the intervals of a not very interesting love story, he praises the beauty of England, lingering with special delight over his native county, Devon. The greater part of the poem is written in a freely overrun form of the heroic couplet; it contains some charming lyrics, as does *The Inner Temple Masque* (1615). Hardly less charming are the pastorals of *The Shepherd's Pipe* (1614). Browne's work is uneven, and very much of it is lacking in strength,



but the best of it has great sweetness and grace. The exultant spirit of the age is evident in his apostrophe to England :

Hail, thou my native soil ! thou blessed plot  
Whose equal all the world affordeth not !  
Show me who can so many crystal rills,  
Such sweet-clothed valleys or aspiring hills,  
Such wood-ground, pastures, quarries, wealthy mines,  
Such rocks in whom the diamond fairly shines,  
And if the earth can show the like again,  
Yet will she fail in her sea-ruling men.

Next to Browne may be mentioned his friend, George Wither. Wither (1588–1667), much beloved of Lamb and of good critics before him and after. After a youthful volume of satires, which caused him to be imprisoned in the Marshalsea, he published successively the volumes which contain his best work—*The Shepherd's Hunting* (1615), *Fidelia* (1617), and *Philarete* (1622). Wither's pastorals have all the joy of Browne's, with something more of intimacy. Lacking Wordsworth's high transcendentalism, he used poetry after Wordsworth's fashion to show the beauty of simple things—an English Christmastide, a child in its cradle, the humble grace of ' the grateful and obsequious marigold '. The religious poetry of his later years has been unfairly disparaged. Though not of his best, it contains much that is beautiful and characteristic of his quiet, happy genius.

High place among the Spenserians must be accorded to the brothers, Giles and Phineas Fletcher (1588–1623 and 1582–1650), sons of Giles the sonneteer, and cousins of the more famous John. The chief work of Giles the younger is his long poem, *Christ's Victory and Triumph* (1610), written in an eight-lined stanza of his own devising. Giles, like Phineas, was a strongly religious man, and his religion has passed into his verse and helped to give it its distinctive fervour and beauty. Particularly impressive is the passage in the first book, in which Mercy pleads to God for Man, and overcomes the stern prompting of Justice. Spenser's influence may be seen in Fletcher's fine use of allegory, in the high purpose of his work, in the sweep and flow and majesty of his stanza, and in the frequent exquisiteness of his descriptive passages. Here, for instance, is the stanza describing the joy of earth at the Saviour's resurrection :

Th' engladged Spring, forgetful now to weep,  
Began t' eblazon from her leavy bed,  
The waking swallow broke her half year's sleep,  
And every bush lay deeply purpured  
With violets ; the wood's late-wint'ry head  
Wide flaming primroses set all on fire,  
And his bald trees put on their green attire,  
Among whose infant leaves the joyous birds conspire.

Phineas Fletcher has left much more work than Giles, and

a good deal of this is of the lighter kind. To this class belong *Britain's Ida* (1628), a dainty poem once attributed to Spenser; *Sicelides* (1614), a masque of fishers and fishing; and the *Piscatory Eclogues* (1633). *Elisa* (1633) is a fine elegy upon a dead friend, written at the request of the friend's wife. *The Apollyonists* (1627), a religious allegory, describes the fall of Lucifer, and hits at the Church of Rome. But Fletcher's longest and most remarkable work is *The Purple Island*, a poem in twelve cantos taking for its subject the body of man. The first five cantos are physiological, sometimes rather distressingly so. Fletcher chronicles each part of the body, narrates its functions, and invests it with poetic attributes, just as Drayton had invested the streams and mountains of England in *Polyolbion*. The result is a curiosity, though it is doubtful whether Fletcher meant it to be considered so. Here is a stanza describing the functions of the ear:

The portal hard and dry all hung around  
With silken, thin, carnation tapestry,  
Whose open gate drags in each voice and sound,  
That through the shaken air passes by.  
The entrance winding, lest some violence  
Might fright the Judge with sudden influence,  
Or some unwelcome guest might vex the busy sense.

It is curious to find amid metrical descriptions of the bile, spleen, phlegm, and gall, stanzas in praise of Elizabeth, and some really fine passages of natural description. When Fletcher passes from humanity's outward case to the soul within, poetry results more naturally, and there are some impressive Spenserian personifications, as, for instance, that of Despair in the Twelfth Canto. *The Apollyonists* and *The Purple Island*, as well as *Christ's Victory and Triumph*, were familiar to Milton, and their influence is evident in *Paradise Lost*.

Campion. Thomas Campion (1567-1619) is memorable for his treatise on English prosody, for a few masques, and for the lyrics contained in his four *Books of Aires* (1601, 1612, 1617). The treatise, as has been shown elsewhere, attempted to demonstrate the superiority of rhymeless over rhymed English lyric. Campion's own practice disproved the contention, for his best lyrics are rhymed—for instance, the beautiful 'Follow your saint', 'There is a garden in her face', and 'Now winter nights enlarge'; yet a handful of his rhymeless lyrics—as 'Rose-cheeked Laura, come' and 'Hark all you ladies'—are so exquisite as to more than justify his use of this form. Many of his metrical ambiguities are accounted for when it is remembered that his songs were written to music of his own composition. He had the true lyric gift, and Henley is less than just to him when he dismisses him as a 'curious metrist'.

Donne. In John Donne (1573-1631) we encounter a mightier than Campion, a great poet who had a profound influence on succeed-



ing poetry. Comparatively little of Donne's verse was published during his lifetime: a full edition of it appeared in 1635. The most important of his earlier poems were his *Songs and Sonnets*, his *Elegies*, and his *Satires*. The *Satires* were written in a style of deliberate harshness—a harshness adopted, we can hardly doubt, in direct imitation of the style of Persius. Like the satires of Marston and Hall, they hit hard at certain characters and customs of the time. Perhaps the most vivid of them is the fourth, with its picture of the tedious, travelled 'Macaron' or fop. The third is serious and reflective; throughout the series there are constant gleams of wit and vision. They are written in a loose and freely overrun form of the couplet, which clearly aims at a conversational effect, and is in striking contrast to the stricter form used by Donne in the *Anniversaries* and elsewhere. For a great while the *Satires* were regarded as Donne's most important and characteristic work. Their influence is strongly evident in Dryden, and they were copied by Pope.

Our own age attaches more importance to the songs and elegies. In these Donne<sup>1</sup> breaks with the Petrarchan tradition in so far as it involves the use of formal and courtly compliment; yet much of Renaissance Platonism survives in his constant sense of the ideal world behind the visible, and in his contempt for the flesh as that which thwarts the soul. Occasionally in these earlier poems—as in the famous 'Sweetest love, I do not go' addressed to his wife—the ideal is foremost, and the beauty and power of the soul, and of love, are exquisitely vindicated; but in very many of them contempt has become the motive force, and the poet interprets life and love cynically and sensually. Yet Donne's cynicism is no cold principle of negation; it has intensity and passion; and the fierce defiant sensuality of the elegies is lightened by his constant wit and strange possessing imagery. Occasionally, too, love, even in these poems, wins free of cynicism, and renders the pure homage of *The Picture*. *The Progress of the Soul*, a curious study in metempsychosis, is thoroughly characteristic of Donne's genius. His *Verse Epistles* are largely autobiographical, and contain *The Calm* and *The Storm*, of which the first was justly approved by Jonson. His later devotional poems, like his earlier love poems, are strained and artificial in form, but sincere in their craving for utter self-revelation. Perhaps the most profound and beautiful of all his poems is the second of the two *Anniversaries*, nominally a funeral elegy upon Mistress Elizabeth Drury, but actually a passionate affirmation of the soul's worth, and of its triumph over death.

The music of Donne's verse is often as unearthly as the quality of his thought. Frequently it baffles the ear; yet much in him that may at first seem dissonance is in reality the subtlest melody. At its best his lyric has an intensity and

<sup>1</sup> Cf. H. J. C. Grierson, *Cambridge History of English Literature*, vol. iv, p. 195

a strangeness which are without parallel in our literature. But it was rather by his imagery than by his rhythm that he made his profound effect upon English poetry. His verse is packed with symbols, now fantastic, now startling through their very homeliness, but nearly always fraught with haunting suggestion. Two quotations from the second *Anniversary* will serve to show the range of his imagination :

Think then, my soul, that death is but a groom  
Which brings a taper to the outward room,  
Whence thou spiest first a little glimmering light,  
And after brings it nearer to thy sight ;  
For such approaches doth heaven make in death.

and :

her pure and eloquent blood  
Spoke in her cheeks, and so distinctly wrought  
That one might almost say, her body thought.

The moods expressed in Donne's poetry were infinitely various, ranging from desire and jealousy to adoration, and that brooding on death which is part of the Renaissance soul. He is the first of the poets styled by Johnson 'metaphysical'. Many men of the next generation hold of him, though too often with a difference ; for in their poetry the form constantly persists after the soul has departed, so that symbolism becomes mere 'conceit'. Donne is a poet of the 'decadence' ; but with him, as with so many others, decadence is a variation, and not a failure, of strength and beauty. In many moods we may prefer his broken yet intense music to the organ roll of Milton.

Drum-  
mond.

A true poet, though a lesser one than either Donne or Jonson, is William Drummond of Hawthornden (1585-1649). Drummond's chaste gift of expression and finely imaginative habit of mind are perhaps seen at their best in the madrigals, sonnets, songs, and elegies which were published in the second edition of his *Tears on the Death of Moeliades* (1616). Many of the poems in this collection attain a very high level of beauty, and display their author's poignant sense of tragedy in life. Under the title of *Forth Feasting* (1617) Drummond published some admirably turned but uninspired verses on the occasion of the king's visit to Scotland. His *Flowers of Sion* (1623) consists of religious verse which is often of quite remarkable beauty. Drummond, with a little more strength, would have been a very great poet indeed. His sonnets and those of his friend, the Earl of Stirling, are noticed elsewhere. Lord Stirling is also memorable for his interesting *Monarchical Tragedies of Croesus, Darius, Alexander, and Julius Caesar*.

Jonson.

An influence even more important than Donne's is that of Ben Jonson, whose lyric poetry is chiefly contained in his collections *The Forest, Underwoods, and Charis*, and in numerous passages of his plays and masques. He, no less than Donne, represents a reaction against the Petrarchan tradition,



with its formal and outworn imagery; but in his case the cure was provided, not through the substitution of a new and more vital symbolism, but by recourse to the clear and balanced beauty of the best classical lyric. Jonson strove to bring into English poetry the restraint, simplicity, and strength of Greek and Latin song. Several of his own songs are paraphrases of classical originals; and even where there is no direct debt of this kind, the influence of the old lyrists is powerful. It appears in the beautiful *Hymn to Diana* and *Song to Celia* ('Drink to me only with thine eyes'), in the famous elegy, 'Though beauty be the mask of praise', and in the Ode on Sir Lucius Cary and Sir H. Morison. Jonson's massive virility is evident even in his more delicate and highly wrought verse. Perhaps his least satisfactory poems are his satirical epigrams, written in imitation of Martial, yet showing little of Martial's wit and neatness. In respect of lyric poetry as of much else, Jonson's influence is strongly evident in the practice of the young men who gathered round him at the Devil Tavern and were proud to be styled his 'sons'. Notice of these must be reserved for a fresh chapter.

## CHAPTER XV

### CAROLINE POETRY

Fashions in contemporary poetry — Herrick, Carew, Randolph, Suckling, Lovelace — Religious Poetry: Crashaw, Herbert, Vaughan, and others — Developments of the Couplet — Waller, Denham, Cowley, Marvell — Minors.

As has been indicated in the previous chapter, the dominating influences in Elizabethan lyric poetry, the Petrarchan and the Spenserian, were towards the end of the period giving way to the new forms and forces exemplified after widely different fashions in the poetry of Jonson and Donne. The greatest poet of the school of Jonson—in some ways the greatest lyrist of the English Renaissance—was Robert Herrick (1591–1674), whose fame rests upon his two volumes of poems, respectively religious and secular, *Noble Numbers* (1647) and *Hesperides* (1648). Herrick was a sworn disciple and admirer of Jonson, and had partaken of those 'lyrick feasts' held at 'the Sun, the Dog, the Triple Tun' where each verse of his Master's 'outdid the meat, outdid the frolic wine'. To Jonson he prays:

When I a verse shall make,  
 Know I have praycd thee  
 For old religion's sake,  
 Saint Ben, to aid me.

His prayer is not merely an outburst of personal affection, but a profession of artistic faith. The classical grace and perfection

of Jonson at his best are richly evident throughout Herrick's poetry; but in Herrick's most characteristic pieces there are a lightness and an exquisite play of fancy which are all his own. Some of his most famous lyrics are addressed to women whom he loved, or pretended to have loved—Julia, Dianeme, Silvia, and Anthea. To the first of these are addressed *The Night Piece*, and many poems hardly less famous and perfect; the last is immortal in 'Bid me to live'. In many of Herrick's poems—as in 'To Violets', 'The Primrose', 'Corinna's Going a-Maying'—the love of women is lyrically blended with the love of flowers; yet to Herrick nature was no divine mother, as she was to become to Wordsworth and Meredith, but a mistress whose casual favours he enjoyed with pagan delight. Here he is one with Théodore de Banville, whom he also resembles in his love of fairies, in the particular note of his gallantry, the silver perfection of his verse, and in his maxim of life—'to live merrily and trust to good verses'—which has its exact counterpart in an *envoi* of the French poet:

So, Prince, I scorn the harsh world's cruel hest  
And own me thrall of rhyme and mirth and jest,  
Of song, of flowers, of Fancy's idlest toy:  
Ay, Prince, of Poesy! Lo, 'tis now confesst!  
This is the only way of peace and joy!

But if Banville's verse at its best is as finished as Herrick's, Herrick's sweep is freer, and his music larger and more various. Only one or two of his lyrics—*To Anthea*, for instance, and 'Sweet Spirit, comfort me'—display emotional intensity: the rest are great through sheer force of poetry. And thus, strangely enough, his spiritual limitation becomes an artistic triumph.

Carew.

Thomas Carew (1598 ?–1639 ?), like Herrick, was proud of his discipleship to Jonson, of whom he wrote

The wiser world doth greater Thee confess  
Than all men else, than Thyself only less.

His best poems have the measured beauty of his master's; they are more marmoreal than Herrick's, and lack his winning and easy habit of self-revelation. Often, as in *A Looking-Glass*, Carew uses 'conceits' after a fashion deriving partly from the older Petrarchan tradition, partly from the 'metaphysical' innovations of Donne. Often there is direct reminiscence of Donne, as in 'To his Mistress in Absence', which carries echoes of 'The Ecstasy'. A handful of his lyrics—notably 'He that loves a rosy cheek', and 'Ask me no more where Jove bestows'—rank amongst the greatest in the language; but his most personal and passionate and audacious poem is 'The Rapture'. He collaborated with Inigo Jones in the production of a fine masque, *Coelum Britannicum*, which was performed at Whitehall on Shrove Tuesday night of 1634.

Randolph, Suckling, Lovelace. The short-lived and brilliant Thomas Randolph (1605–1635) was also a 'son of Ben', and his most famous lyric, 'I have



a mistress for perfections rare', has an unmistakably Jonsonian rhythm. There is a delightfully English quality in his 'Ode to Master Anthony Stafford, to hasten him into the Country'. Other poets who owe much to Jonson are William Habington (1605-1654) and William Cartwright (1611-1643). The lyrics of Habington's *Castara* are addressed to his wife, and are often of admirable quality. Cartwright has left some charming songs; his best thing is perhaps *To Chloe*. Two greater names are those of Sir John Suckling (1609?-1642) and Richard Lovelace (1618-1658). In technique as in sentiment Suckling's lyrics are more easy and devil-may-care than those of Carew and Jonson. He owned his admiration for Donne, and in more than one place has copied him without achieving his profundity. One might say of him, as Scott said of Byron, that he 'managed his pen with the careless and negligent ease of a man of quality'. The gay and cynical spirit of the Cavalier is evident in his best-known lyrics, 'The Constant Lover' and 'Why so pale and wan?' Some of his best songs appeared in his plays, which receive separate notice in this volume. Suckling has not only an attitude, but a light and lilting music of his own. His best things—for instance, his famous 'Ballad of a Wedding'—show a delightful combination of raciness and charm.

Lovelace has left a considerable volume of poetry, much of which displays the worst faults of the age, and is 'conceited' and tedious to a degree. At other times he can write charmingly, as in 'The Grasshopper':

O thou that swing'st upon the waving hair  
Of some well-filled oaten beard,  
Drunk every night with a delicious tear  
Dropt thee from heaven, where thou wert reared.

Two of his lyrics, 'To Althea from Prison', and 'To Lucasta, on going beyond the Seas', are more than charming: they are consummate.

Some of the finest poetry of the period comes from a group of Religious  
religious writers, the chief of whom are George Herbert (1593-1633), Richard Crashaw (1613?-1649), and Henry Vaughan (1622-1695). Most of Herbert's religious verse is included in his collection *The Temple* (1633), a work which suggested to Crashaw the title of his own collection, *Steps to the Temple* (1646). The *Poems* published by Vaughan in 1646 were chiefly secular; his best religious poetry is contained in his two volumes, *Silex Scintillans* (1651) and *Olor Iscanus* (1652). All of these poets belong to the class described by Johnson as 'metaphysical', and employ imagery which is constantly fantastic and exaggerated, sometimes absurd, but often of strange beauty and power.

Crashaw's best work—notably the great *Nativity Ode*, *The Flaming Heart*, and the *Hymn to the Name and Honour of the Admirable Saint Theresa*—shows him to be beyond doubt the

greatest poet of the three. These poems are consummate ; their recurrent ' conceits ' are transfigured by their passion and deep sensuous glow. Crashaw wooed heaven with a lover-like intensity, and found strange and often exquisite imagery in which to express his ecstasy. Had he been less ' metaphysical ' we should never have been given the Shepherds' praise of the Infant Jesus :

We saw Thee in Thy balmy nest,  
Young dawn of our eternal Day,  
We saw Thine eyes break from their East  
And chase the trembling shades away.  
We saw Thee, and we blest the sight,  
We saw Thee by Thine own sweet light.

Crashaw's worst work embodies the most strained and ludicrous excesses of metaphysical poetry, but his best soars to its highest conceivable pitch. Sometimes in him beauty and pathos touch each other ; thus in *The Weeper* he can write the following dreadful stanza, of the Magdalene's tears :

Every morn from hence  
A brisk cherub something sips  
Whose sacred influence  
Adds sweetness to his sweetest lips,  
Then to his music, and his song  
Tastes of his breakfast all day long.

In the same poem, another stanza begins disquietingly and, daring all, passes into perfect beauty :

Not in the Evening's eyes,  
When they red with weeping are  
For the Sun that dies,  
Sits Sorrow with a face so fair ;  
Nowhere but here did ever meet  
Sweetness so sad, sadness so sweet.

There are few more impassioned lines in the language than those which conclude *The Flaming Heart*. Crashaw has left several translations in verse. His best secular poem is the charming *Wishes to his Supposed Mistress*.

Herbert.

Herbert's imagery is hardly less fantastic than Crashaw's, though his emotion has a quieter glow. His great book, *The Temple*, was preceded by a long induction, *The Church Porch*, containing moral and religious maxims. These are sometimes quaint, as when the bibber of wine is told to

pour the shame  
Which it would pour on thee, upon the floor.

Others are touched with poetry ; thus the soldier is bidden to

Chase brave employments with a naked sword  
Throughout the world.

*The Temple* itself is full of ' conceits ', some of which are merely fantastic, as the verse which illustrates the omnipotence of Providence :



To show Thou art not bound, as if Thy lot  
 Were worse than ours, sometimes Thou shiftest hands,  
 Most things move the underjaw, the crocodile not,  
 Most things sleep lying, the elephant leans or stands.

Yet Herbert's outrages against taste are hardly ever so extreme and startling as Crashaw's, and his best devotional lyrics have a quaint and perfect charm which, like Crashaw's intenser beauty, is inseparable from the 'metaphysical' habit of thought and expression. Some of his most delightful poems—*The Quip*, for instance, and the *Pulley*—are spun merely of 'conceits'. *The Collar* surprises by its opening violence:

I struck the board, and cried 'No more;  
 I will abroad,'

and closes quietly, and with strange beauty:

But as I raved and grew more fierce and wild  
 At every word,  
 Methought I heard one calling 'Child',  
 And I replied, 'My Lord'.

Herbert's most famous, and probably his finest, lyric is *Virtue* ('Sweet day, so cool, so calm, so bright'); but a few of his other poems are of hardly less beauty.

Vaughan in his youth had written love-lyrics to Amoret, and a drinking song in praise of 'royal, witty sack, the poet's soul'. He had also, in a poem to his friend 'R. W.', owned his admiration of Jonson and Randolph; but his sacred poetry—which is by far his better part—shows him to have been strongly influenced by Herbert. He is a greater poet than his master, however; his best religious verse has a mystical fervour which is strangely moving, while his 'conceits' are less frequent and extreme than those of Crashaw. Perhaps his finest poem is 'They are all gone into the world of light'; hardly less beautiful is *The Retreat*, which is said to have suggested to Wordsworth his *Ode on some Intimations of Immortality*. The quality of his genius appears in such lines as these:

Where through thick pangs, high agonies,  
 Faith into life breaks, and Death dies.

and

I saw Eternity the other night  
 Like a great ring of pure and endless light,  
 All calm as it was bright.

and

Follow the cry no more: there is  
 An ancient way,  
 All strewed with flowers and happiness  
 And fresh as May;  
 There turn, and turn no more: let wits  
 Smile at fair eyes  
 Or lips: but who there weeping sits  
 Hath got the prize.

Of lesser but definite importance among the religious writers of the period were Thomas Traherne (1637-1674) and Francis Traherne and Quarles.

Quarles (1592-1644). Traherne's verse is uncertain in quality; it has much of Vaughan's mysticism without his intensity, and at its best has a peculiarly winning charm. His poems were discovered in manuscript by the late Mr. Bertram Dobell, and were first published in 1903. He has also left some fine imaginative prose. Quarles was a voluminous writer, but is chiefly known to-day through his *Emblems* (1635), short religious poems whose symbolism is eked out, after the fashion of 'emblems', with illustrations. Quarles has his full share of the quaintness of the age, which with him is often homely and humorous, but is sometimes suffused with beauty. Two long religious poems, *The Song of the Soul* by Henry More, and *Psyche* by Joseph Beaumont, deserve mention here, though to-day they are 'seldom pored on'.

Develop-  
ments of  
the Coup-  
let.

If English lyric during this period was undergoing an important development, an even more important one was affecting the heroic couplet. The English rhyming couplet, like English blank verse, had originated in a curbed and measured form, had gradually won fuller freedom, and, in the hands of its later and inferior practitioners, had passed into licence and disorder. In its earlier stages there had been little variation of beat and measure, little overrunning of couplet into couplet. Such a tendency, however, became pronounced during the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods. Many Elizabethans hesitate between the stricter and the freer ways; William Browne for the most part handles his couplets with freedom, and so does Donne in his early satires. In William Chamberlayne's long couplet-poem, *Pharonnida* (1659), metrical liberty has certainly degenerated into metrical licentiousness. Chamberlayne, with the view of giving his couplets ease and speed, overruns them freely, and frequently, for the same reason, ends his lines with unemphatic words. This practice had already been adopted in blank verse, often, as in Shakespeare's case, with the happiest results; but the couplet is less apt for such handling. In both forms licence was pushed beyond due limits, and resulted in metrical anarchy. As we are here concerned with the so-called 'reform of English numbers', it is important to notice the exact reasons why such 'reform' occurred, and was regarded as necessary. These may be gathered from a glance at the following 'unreformed' couplets, from *Pharonnida*:

That since-famed gulf (where the brave Austrian made  
The Turkish crescents an eternal shade  
Beneath dishonour seek) Lepanto, lay  
So near that from their lofty station they  
A ship, upon whose streamers there were fixt  
The Christian badge, saw in fierce battle mixt  
With a prevailing Turkish squadron, that  
With shouts assault what now lay only at  
That feeble guard, which, under the pretence  
Of injuring others, seeks its own defence.

It may be remarked that this is only a brief specimen of



Chamberlayne's periods, which not infrequently run for thirty lines without a full pause.

Such writing afflicted the delicate taste of Edmund Waller (1605-1687). 'Methought,' said he, according to Aubrey, 'I never saw a good copy of English verses; they want smoothness: then I began to essay.' Other men were thinking as he did. Sir John Beaumont in his *Lines to his Late Majesty, concerning the True Form of English Poetry*, deplored the shapelessness of English verse and demanded a new pattern. Models of correctness were not wanting to Waller. Donne, if his metre had run to looseness in the satires, had in his later *Epistles* written more strict and formal couplets. Fairfax, whose influence upon himself Waller acknowledges, had, in his translation of Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata*, concluded each of his eight-lined stanzas with a stopped couplet; and George Sandys, while ensuing freedom and variety in his translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, had carefully avoided the looseness into which Chamberlayne was to fall. Waller wrote many poems in the couplet: the most notable are, perhaps, the long and tantalizing *Battle of the Summer Islands*; and the *Instructions to a Painter*, written to commemorate the sea-fighting of 1665. These and his other poems in the same form have little hold upon the present age, but they gave him a prodigious reputation with his own generation, and with at least two succeeding ones. Dryden declared that 'the excellence and dignity of rhyme were never fully known till Mr. Waller taught it', and that he first made easy writing a fine art. Pope praised him for his 'smoothness'. It is perhaps less difficult to understand what the men of the early eighteenth century saw in Waller than to share their enthusiasm for him. They gave him credit for moulding that form of the couplet which became their own standard measure, and for wielding it, in their opinion for the first time, with ease and smoothness. Dismayed by the excesses of the looser form, they welcomed a variety which ensured elegance and order without forfeiting ease, observed the caesura and the normal accentual beat, eschewed weak and loose rhymes, and was far advanced toward the practice, eventually adopted by themselves, of stopping each couplet and confining the sense to its limits. These metrical devices apart, Waller's language is easy, light, and elegant, and was thus highly to the taste of the Augustan Age. A generation which has read *Tristram of Lyonesse* realizes that the heroic couplet may be freely overrun without becoming loose or weak, and believes, conversely, that the end-stopped form is ill-suited to express the highest flights of passion or imagination.

Men of all generations can unite in appreciating the beauty of Waller's finest lyrics—'On a Girdle', 'Go, Lovely Rose', or 'Old Age', with its unforgettable couplet:

The soul's dark cottage, batter'd and decay'd,  
Lies in new light through chinks that Time has made.

Denham. Sir John Denham (1615-1669) shared with Waller and Cowley the reputation of having been a 'reformer' of English 'numbers'. His play *The Sophy* (1641) first brought him reputation, though there is little in it to attract the reader of to-day. It was followed in 1642 by *Cooper's Hill*, his most famous work, which describes the landscape seen from his house at Cooper's Hill, including the distant view of London and the nearer one of Windsor. Many of Denham's descriptions of Nature are interwoven with reflection; yet there is a far cry between him and Cowper or Wordsworth. The poem's finest and most famous passage is that addressed to the Thames, beginning, "O could I flow like thee". *Cooper's Hill* favours the end-stopped variety of the couplet, though Denham deserts this not infrequently for the overrun form, which he had used in his youthful translation of Virgil's second *Aeneid*. He has also left a verse paraphrase of Cicero's *De Senectute*, and poems on *Prudence* and *Justice*, together with shorter pieces. He lacks Waller's ease and elegance, and to modern readers his verse possesses little attraction.

Cowley. The reputation of Abraham Cowley (1618-1667), though it is inferior to his contemporary fame, stands higher to-day than Denham's. His collected works, which he published in 1656, consisted of his youthful lyrics, entitled *Miscellanies*; a further collection of lyrics, *The Mistress*; his *Pindarique Odes*; and his unfinished sacred poem,  *Davideis*. Cowley's lyrics illustrate curiously the spirit of the age; many of them are 'metaphysical' to a degree, and have Donne's fantastic strangeness without his fire; others, notably his *Anacreontics*, are as classically smooth as anything of Jonson's. Cowley tells us in the *Miscellanies* that he considered bombast to be a 'crying sin o' the English muse'; yet he could never persuade himself to forgo it. But if innumerable examples of it might be cited from his poems, he could on occasion use 'conceits' after happier fashion, as in the concluding stanza of *Friendship in Absence*:

And when no art affords me help or ease,  
I seek with verse my griefs t' appease,  
Just as a bird that flies about  
And beats itself against the cage,  
Finding at last no passage out  
It sits and sings, and so o'ercomes its rage.

Cowley's elegiac verses on William Harvey and on Crashaw are affecting and sincere, though the latter poem contains one of his most extreme and infelicitous 'conceits'. At other times, as in the admirably playful *Chronicle*, and in *Inconstancy*, he flaunts the fashionable cynicism of the time, and proclaims

The world's a scene of changes, and to be  
Constant, in Nature were inconstancy.

The pleasant personal note which is so frequent in Cowley's prose appears in such a stanza as this, from *The Wish*:



Ah yet, e'er I descend to the grave,  
 May I a small House and large Garden have,  
 And a few friends and many Books, both true,  
 Both wise, and both delightful too!

Cowley's Odes were written in professed imitation of Pindar's, though, as was subsequently shown by Congreve, they ignored the fundamental laws of his prosody. Among the more successful is that 'To Mr. Hobbes'—the 'great Columbus of the Golden Lands of New Philosophies'. The Odes are little, perhaps too little, read nowadays; though 'conceited' to a degree, they contain fine things, and are interesting historically, owing to their curious effect on the subsequent development of the English Ode.  *Davideis*, as its sub-title indicates, was *A Sacred Poem of the Troubles of David*. Written in the couplet, it is marred by incorrigible 'conceits' and constant digressions. Much of the Second Book is simply a chronicle of the kings of Israel and Judah; but the First Book contains a fine description of Hell, home of 'tyrannous and unquestioned night', and the Fourth Book is memorable for David's glowing description of Jonathan. In  *Davideis* and elsewhere Cowley played his part in the evolution of the couplet, to which he strove to impart fullness and force rather than the easy smoothness of Waller. His prose is discussed elsewhere. His early comedy, *The Guardian*, was revised after the Restoration, and acted under the title *Cutter of Coleman Street*.

The work of Andrew Marvell (1621–1678) falls into two classes: the first of these includes his early poetry in praise of love and nature, and his non-satirical patriotic poetry; the second comprises the fierce and outspoken satire which, after the Restoration, he directed at the abuses of his beloved country. Marvell had, perhaps, as keen an eye for Nature and as passionate a delight in her as any English poet before Cowper, or even Wordsworth. While tutor to Lord Fairfax's daughter at Nun Appleton in Yorkshire, he had drunk his fill of natural beauty, and much of this had passed into his song. There did he

through the hazels thick espy  
 The hatching throstle's shining eye,<sup>1</sup>

and note the 'sapphire-winged mist' of the kingfisher skimming the streams, or lose himself in the beauty of the garden,

Annihilating all that's made  
 To a green thought in a green shade.<sup>2</sup>

Some of his poems—for instance, *Eyes and Tears*—are as 'conceited' as anything of Donne's; but the conceits are given the happiest turn in the famous *To His Coy Mistress*, which contains the great couplet,

And yonder all before us lie  
 Deserts of vast eternity.

<sup>1</sup> Upon Appleton House.

<sup>2</sup> The Garden.

Marvell's most great and stately poem is his *Horatian Ode upon Cromwell's Return from Ireland*, with its splendid stanzas describing the last hours of Charles. His poems show a considerable emotional range: some of them—as *The Dialogue between Thyrsis and Dorinda*—are light and joyous; others—as *A Dialogue between the Soul and Body*—are lit with moral and religious fervour. The most notable of his satires is the *Last Instructions to a Painter*, which owes its title to one of Waller's best-known poems.

Lesser  
Poets.

The age was remarkable for a number of small poets, many of whom left long poems. The dramatist Shakerley Marmion is represented by *Cupid and Psyche* (1637), John Chalkhill by *Thealma and Clearchus* (1683), Sir Francis Kynaston by *Leoline and Sydanis* (1642), and the amazingly extravagant Edward Benlowes by *Theophila, or Love's Sacrifice*. These poems, though metrically and otherwise they have a certain bearing on the evolution of literature, are hardly literature themselves. Two writers, however, stand somewhat ahead of the rest: the first is William Chamberlayne, whose *Pharonnida* (1659), already mentioned for its metre, is a lengthy and disjointed poetical romance containing passages of genuine beauty; and Sir William Davenant (1606–1668), whose *Gondibert* is an unfinished heroic poem possessing a determined moral purpose and written in rhyming quatrains. Davenant is far from being a great poet. Among writers of shorter poems may be mentioned Thomas Stanley, Henry King, and John Hall, each of whom has left some fine lyrics. The greatest poet of the age will be discussed in a separate chapter.

## CHAPTER XVI

### JOHN MILTON

THE spirit of John Milton's life (1608–1674) is perhaps best expressed in his second sonnet,<sup>1</sup> and in the words of his letter to his friend Diodati: 'You make many inquiries as to what I am about. What am I thinking of? Why, with God's help, of immortality! Forgive the word, I only whisper it in your ear! Yes, I am pluming my wings for a flight.' From his early youth onwards, Milton's was a dedicated life. He had achieved erudition and scholarship during his seven years at Cambridge, where learning had been broadened and humanized by the Renaissance, and Calvinistic theology and Aristotelian logic had alike become leavened with Platonism. Here Milton, in spite of certain troubles by the way, 'performed the collegiate and academical exercises to the admiration of all'. Here he

<sup>1</sup> Beginning:

How soon hath Time, the subtle thief of youth,  
Stolen on his wing my three-and-twentieth year.



learnt to write Latin prose freely and correctly, and Latin verse, not merely correctly, but in such a way as to liberate inspiration. His university studies were those of his time, and he studied hard; his habit of life was pure, and for this, and perhaps also because of his beauty and natural refinement, his fellows styled him 'the lady of Christ's'.

Even as an undergraduate he had written great poetry in the English tongue. To this period belong his exquisite lines *On the Death of a Fair Infant*, and his stately *Ode on the Nativity*, which to all who knew must have proclaimed the appearance of a new force in poetry. He left Cambridge at the age of twenty-three, and, like Wordsworth, eschewed the occupation of money-getting. Through his father's understanding kindness he was enabled to live for the next seven years in delightful rustic retirement at the village of Horton in Buckinghamshire. These years, he tells us, were 'studious and contemplative'; they were 'altogether spent in the search of religious and civil knowledge'. The quiet beauty of his surroundings passed into his soul and his song: clear reminiscences of it are to be found in the perfect flower-pieces which recur throughout his poems. The earliest fruits of this sojourn were his two great essays in the pastoral ode, *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*. Both of these are constructed on the same model, and both are written in the eight-syllabled rhyming couplet, which Milton handles with admirable ease and variety. *L'Allegro* begins with an invocation to Mirth, and traces a day of the poet's life spent in her company from the dawn, vocal with the lark's song, on through the various scenes and music of the day, till the quiet evening, given to the reading of old romance and of light drama, and to musing on

Such sights as youthful poets dream  
On summer eves by haunted stream.

At the close are heard

soft Lydian airs  
Married to immortal verse,  
Such as the meeting soul may pierce  
In notes with many a winding bout  
Of linkéd sweetness long drawn out.

In *Il Penseroso* there is similar progress, this time beneath the guidance of Melancholy, that

pensive Nun, devout and pure,  
Sober, steadfast, and demure.

The music is the song of Philomel, the study tragedy, and the poem closes on the solemn note of the organ.

In 1634 Milton was asked by his friend, the composer Henry Lawes, to write the words for a musical entertainment to be given at Ludlow Castle before the Earl of Bridgewater, President of Wales and the Marches. The result was *Comus*, a masque in form, yet greater than any masque hitherto written. Its theme of innocence triumphant over an enchanter's

Early  
Poetry.

*L'Allegro*  
and *Il*  
*Penseroso*.

*Comus*.

spells is Spenserian, and Spenserian, too, is the sensuous beauty of its speeches and songs. It contains a perfect lyric in 'Sweet Echo, sweetest nymph that liv'st unseen'.

*Lycidas.*

*Lycidas*, Milton's elegy on his fellow student, Edward King, was published in 1638, together with elegies on King from other hands. There is no reason to think that Milton had known King much more intimately than Shelley knew Keats; but in *Lycidas*, as in *Adonais*, grief is universalized, and achieves a grandeur which transcends any merely personal poignancy. Both elegies, vastly as they differ in spirit and general handling, are constructed closely on the model of the Greek pastoral elegy; and in both, this convention, so far from inhibiting inspiration, directs and moulds it into exquisiteness. Technically, in skill of rhyming and rhythm, *Lycidas* was never surpassed by Milton; nor in the wider aspect of beauty did he often surpass the passage beginning 'Bring the rather primrose that forsaken dies', nor the great lines,

Or whether thou, to our moist vows denied,  
Sleep'st by the fable of Bellerus old,  
Where the great Vision of the guarded Mount  
Looks toward Namancos and Bayona's hold.

From  
Poetry to  
Prose.

The details of Milton's Italian tour (1638-9), and of his subsequent essays in matrimony and politics, lie outside the scope of the present volume. After visiting Florence, Rome, Naples, and Geneva, and making the acquaintance of Grotius and Galileo, he returned to England. 'I considered it dishonourable', he wrote, 'to be enjoying myself in foreign lands while my countrymen were striking a blow for freedom.' This sentence embodies one master-impulse of Milton's life—that which led him for the next twenty years to forgo poetry save for a handful of sonnets—and to put his whole might into prose written on behalf of liberty. That the earlier impulse was not dead may be seen from his reference in 1641 'to the inward prompting which grows daily upon me that by labour and intent study, which I take to be my portion in this life, joined with the strong propensity of nature, I might perhaps leave something so written to after times as they would not willingly let it die'. Yet this instinct was for the time-being directed to political rather than poetic ends.

His Prose  
Works.

His next work, his *Tractate on Education*, written in 1642 at the request of Samuel Hartlib, reflects much of the experience he himself had gained from schoolmastering. A more distressing experience—the unhappiness of his first marriage—resulted in a more fervid piece of prose—*The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* (1643), in which, as in the later *Tetrachordon* and *Colasterion*, he pleads for the granting of liberty when the marriage bond has become intolerable. His publication of the *Doctrine and Discipline*, in defiance of the recent licensing ordinance, led immediately to the writing of his most famous prose work, *Areopagitica, for the Liberty of Unlicensed*



*Printing.* Milton does not claim an immunity for all books, however outrageous, after publication; his protest is directed against such a censorship before publication as would entirely prevent the appearance of unorthodox works. He pleads his cause with a mighty energy, and the best periods of the *Areopagitica* have a fervour and a music unsurpassed in the prose of our race.

To this earlier period of Milton's prose writings belong also the series of pamphlets in which he attacked 'prelatical episcopacy'. The earliest and best known of these is *The Reformation, and the causes that hitherto have hindered it*.

From the political, though not from the literary, point of view, the most important class of his prose work was that beginning with *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* (1649), published fourteen days after the execution of Charles I, which it vindicated. His *Eiconoclastes*, written in refutation of the royalist *Eicon Basilike*, followed close upon his appointment as Latin Secretary to the Commonwealth. From now onwards till the Restoration his writings were mainly political and controversial. His *Defence of the English People (Pro Populo Anglicano Defensio)*, written in reply to the *Defensio Regia* of the great classical scholar, Salmasius, consists largely of personal abuse. Despite its contemporary fame, its chief claim to sublimity lies in the fact that the toil he spent upon it cost Milton his sight. Equally abusive, less famous, but more interesting through its biographical passages, is the *Second Defence*, in which Milton fiercely assails Morus, the reputed author of a further attack upon the regicides. The *Pro Se Defensio* followed in 1655, and, by a piece of unconscious irony, Milton published in 1660, on the very eve of the Restoration, his *Ready and Easy Way to establish a Free Commonwealth*.

Some writers, appalled by the personal virulence recurring throughout Milton's writings, have held that these represent a kind of spiritual interregnum in his life, and that the instinct which produced *Lycidas* and *Comus* slumbered for some twenty years, only to awake with *Paradise Lost*. Nothing could be more unsound than this view. Milton, as we have seen, had from the beginning regarded his life as a dedicated one. When the call came, he gave up to liberty what had been originally meant for poetry, and accepted all the conditions of the change. Personal virulence was universal, if not necessary, in the quarrels of the day. That Milton used it merely meant that he was writing controversial prose, as he was afterwards to write imaginative verse, with his whole might and spirit. If, in the circumstances of the time, he had not been the man to write the *Defensio Secunda*, he could not have been the man to write *Paradise Lost*. The highest flights of his prose have, moreover, marked affinity, both in form and spirit, with his highest poetry, and have often the long roll and swell of his greatest blank verse. If his style frequently becomes unwieldy, and all too seldom reaches the highest moments of *Areopagitica*, at its best it is supremely great.

His Sonnets.

Practically the only poetry which Milton wrote during the twenty years preceding the Restoration was a sprinkling of sonnets. He had tried his hand in this form during his youth, and the most notable result had been the lines on his 'three and twentieth year'. His later sonnets, though scanty in number, have a range of theme which is unparalleled in the previous English practice of the form, and includes vituperation, homage, friendship, playful invitation, solemn indignation, and still more solemn resignation. In quality they range from 'I did but prompt the age', with its commonplace violence, to the transcendent grandeur of 'When I consider how my light is spent'. Milton's sonnet reverts from the Shakespearean form, with its final couplet and free scheme of rhyme, to the stricter Petrarchan model, which had not previously obtained a secure place in English, and had been used with a difference even by its sponsor Wyatt. Not until the day of Wordsworth do we meet again the combined fervour and grandeur which distinguish the best sonnets of Milton.

*Paradise Lost.*

The Restoration, which brought Milton poverty and neglect, brought him also rest from political strife, and the means of achieving his greatest glory, *Paradise Lost*. In his Latin verses to his Italian friend and host, Manso, he had indicated his desire to write a heroic poem, with Arthur for its hero. In 1641, as is shown by the list of some hundred possible subjects contained in his commonplace-book, the theme of Arthur has been dropped, and later still the epic form is substituted for the dramatic. This latter change was probably due, partly to Milton's sense of the epic's superior fitness for his sublime purpose, partly also to the strong disfavour with which he came to regard romantic drama. The main theme of *Paradise Lost* had already been treated, both dramatically and epically, on the Continent and in England. In taking the Fall for his subject, Milton was doubtless attracted by the grandeur of the first great Tragedy of all. He has imparted a good deal of that grandeur to his drawing of Adam and Eve; yet intimate humanity is as necessary a condition of tragedy as grandeur; and in this quality the first inhabitants of Eden, from the very conditions of their being, were necessarily in some sense lacking. It seems as if Milton, fully conscious of this drawback, had endeavoured to make up by sheer force of poetry for what he forfeited in psychology; for there are no more lovely—though there may be more sublime—passages in *Paradise Lost* than those in which we overhear for the first time the speech of our first parents. And if the humans, Adam and Eve, in some sense lack humanity, the same cannot be said of the super-human, Satan. Milton seems to have lavished all the force of his imagination, and even of his sympathy, upon the arch-rebel, whose indomitable will beneath adversity was in so many respects akin to his own. Beauty and grandeur, defiance, compassion, eternal misery and eternal endurance, all combine to make Satan a supreme figure of romance. To heighten the



terrific effect of his fall and journey, Milton has, moreover, retained the old Ptolemaic cosmology, though in the Eighth Book he expresses, through the mouth of Raphael, his knowledge of the newer and truer Copernican theory. Through this choice Milton has achieved some of the most tremendous descriptions in *Paradise Lost*—the scene, for instance, of the fallen angels in hell, and of Satan's journey upward through Chaos to the *primum mobile*, and thence downward through the spheres to Earth and Eden. For the metre of the poem Milton has chosen blank verse in preference to what he calls 'the troublesome and modern bondage of riming'. His line is austere and exquisite; it seldom admits hypermetrical syllables, whether medial or terminal, but passes freely into the long music of the paragraph. All of his vast reading in Hebrew, Latin, Greek, and modern literature, is used to give volume and variety to his verse and the great story which it tells.

Milton's two last poems, *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes*, were published together in 1671; the dates of their composition remain uncertain. *Paradise Regained* expands the story of the Temptation to an extent of more than two thousand lines. It has not the splendour and dramatic intensity of the highest passages of *Paradise Lost*; yet Coleridge described it as 'in its kind the most perfect poem extant', and many of its passages rank among the greatest in Milton. Mark Pattison's statement that it 'betrays the senility of age', and that in it 'Milton has not only curbed his imagination, but has almost suppressed it', must rank among the strangest statements ever made by a fine critic. It is difficult to say where in literature imagination is to be found, if not in the great speech of Satan at the end of the First Book, or in the scene of the Fourth which describes his final defeat. For the most part the blank verse has Milton's old majesty and strength, though there are curious lapses into looseness and harshness.<sup>1</sup>

In *Samson Agonistes*, Milton realized his long-cherished ambition to write a classical drama. The play is Hebrew in subject, Greek rather than Senecan in structure, and intensely personal in spirit and emotion. Like Samson, Milton himself was blind, and at the mercy of his enemies, yet scornful and untameable. Like him he had suffered deeply from 'the ungrateful multitude', and, according to his own view of the case, from woman; and, like him too, he was conscious of

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Perhaps thou lingerest in deep thoughts detained  
Of the enterprise so hazardous and high;  
No wonder, for though in thee be united  
What of perfection can in man be found,  
Or human nature can receive, consider  
Thy life hath yet been private, most part spent  
At home, scarce viewed the Galilean towns  
And once a year Jerusalem, few days  
Short sojourn.

*Paradise  
Regained.*

*Samson  
Agonistes.*

a valiant and upright life foiled and broken by permission of God. The tragedy, therefore, owes its poignancy not only to Milton's art, but to the innermost experience of his soul. Regarded thus, as the product of agony no less than of genius, it is seen to be 'the intensest utterance of the most intense of English poets'. But even apart from its personal relation, this tragedy of a Jew is probably the greatest Greek play ever written in English. The different episodes or acts in which Samson is visited in turn by his father, Dalila, and the Philistine giant Harapha, are so ordered as to elicit every emotion of his soul, and to lead inevitably to the final catastrophe. The tragedy is given depth, fullness, and added beauty by the chorus, especially in those intermediate and final passages in which Milton has availed himself of rhyme. It was thoroughly fitting that the last work of this great rebel should have been *Samson Agonistes*; and it is fitting, too, that here at the very end there should have been no failure of the sublimity whereby Milton ranks second only to Shakespeare among the poets of our tongue.

## CHAPTER XVII

### CAROLINE PROSE

New Developments in Prose — Religious writers — Andrewes, Donne, Taylor, Baxter, Borrow, South — Sir Thomas Browne — Herbert of Cherbury, Clarendon, Hobbes, Harrington, Fuller, Walton.

Develop-  
ment of  
Prose.

It has already been shown that at a time when English prose was wavering between two extremes, and tending on the whole towards extravagance, Hooker's *Ecclesiastical Polity* represents a form making for clearness, balance, and harmony. The same qualities distinguish one main kind of ecclesiastical prose throughout the next century, though the ornate style is also found striving for mastery. Throughout the reign of Elizabeth the sermon had been growing both in vogue and merit, and during the Jacobean and Caroline periods it had won a place among the highest forms of English prose. The interest now felt in it was the product of various causes—the eager zest of patriotic and Protestant Englishmen for anti-Romish polemics, the puritan preference for the sermon over other literary forms, and the fashionable taste created for it by the preoccupation of James I with theology. This fashionable revival was a source both of weakness and of strength. It helped to bring the sermon into prominence and to attract to it some of the best intellects in England; but it also promoted extravagance of expression, and an undue use of the fashionable 'conceits' of the day. The good and the bad tendencies are both evident in the sermons and devotional writings of Lancelot Andrewes (1555–1626), Dean of Westminster, and subsequently Bishop of Winchester under James I.

Andrewes.



These display considerable moral fervour, and Andrewes received less than justice from a certain contemporary who declared that 'he plays with his text rather than preaches with it'. Yet the fine natural quality of his thought is marred by an excessive display of erudition, by long-drawn and finical distinctions, and by over-elaboration of phrase. Kindred qualities are present in the sermons of John Donne, which survive to the number of nearly two hundred, and, with his letters and his tract on *Suicide*, make up his extant prose. In the best of this, however, as in his poetry, extravagance is constantly transfigured by fervour of feeling and imagination, and there is hardly one of his sermons which does not kindle into greatness. No one can doubt either the genius or the earnestness of the man who could write thus of Christ: 'Love him not only in spiritual transfigurations, when he visits thy soul with glorious consolations, but even in his inward eclipses, when he withholds his comforts and withdraws his cheerfulness, even when he makes as though he loved not thee, love him, love him all the way, to his end and to thy end too, to the laying down of thy life for him.'

Donne.

The same richness of imagery, with somewhat less of imaginative fullness and intensity, is evident in the *Centuries of Meditations* of Thomas Traherne. His prose is sensitive in feeling and utterance, and, like Donne's, is constantly quickened by a poet's insight. A quieter and equally delightful play of fancy is evident in *A Priest to the Temple* (*The Country Parson*, 1632) of George Herbert, a delicate and thoroughly English portrait of such an one as Herbert had in mind when he wrote elsewhere:

Only a sweet and virtuous soul  
Like seasoned timber, never gives,  
But when the whole world turns to coal  
Then chiefly lives.

The high imaginative fashion of English devotional writing culminated in Jeremy Taylor (1613-1667), probably the most eloquent writer who ever mounted an English pulpit. Taylor is less profound than Donne, and never equalled the unearthly intensity of his highest flights; but he has much of Donne's richness and colour, and is able to alternate passages of the most gorgeous rhetoric with others of a clear simplicity which Donne seldom attempted. His period has a shifting and various music, and can at times achieve high splendour and majesty. His most famous works are *Holy Living* (1650) and *Holy Dying* (1651), but there is hardly less fine writing in his *Marriage Ring* and his devotional *Golden Grove* (1655). His *Ductor Dubitantium*, like Joseph Hall's *Decisions of Diverse Practical Cases of Conscience* (1649), is a treatise on casuistry, and the greatest work of its kind ever written in English.

Jeremy  
Taylor.

The sermons of Donne and Taylor are among the triumphs of the ornate style; but throughout the century a simpler utterance had been practised by various other divines. Pre-

cedent for this, as we have seen, had been furnished, though after widely different fashions, by Latimer and Hooker. A simple straightforwardness characterizes the best work of Richard Baxter (1615–1691), the finest among whose voluminous writings is *The Saints' Everlasting Rest* (1650). Hardly less voluminous, and equally straightforward in style, are the writings of Henry Hammond, who has been called 'The father of English biblical criticism'. The sermons and theological treatises of Izaak Barrow (1630–1677) are given interest and fullness by his learning and wide experience of the world, and are written in free, clear, and closely-knit English. Three theological writers of note, Richard Chillingworth, Gilbert Sheldon, and John Hales, belonged to the set of scholars and thinkers whom Lucius Cary, Lord Falkland, gathered around him at his house at Great Tew. John Gauden, Bishop of Exeter after the Restoration, is chiefly remarkable through his supposed claim to be the author of *Eicon Basilike*, 'a portraiture of his Sacred Majesty in his sufferings'. This strangely moving treatise, which drew forth in reply the *Eiconoclastes* of Milton, has been said to be the work of Charles I himself, but the better opinion attributes it to Gauden. A more notable figure was Robert South (1634–1716), one of the most virile and vivacious among English preachers, who rejects the ornate style for one ensuing balance, simplicity, and directness. South possesses humour and a grim satirical gift, which he used freely for the confusion of his theological opponents. In him the plain style more than holds its own; but it has lost savour, like so much of later seventeenth-century prose, in the sermons of John Tillotson, which are now felt to be dull and undistinguished, though they enjoyed a vast popularity in their day.

Among the supreme triumphs of the seventeenth century must be reckoned the prose of Sir Thomas Browne (1605–1682). His chief works are *Religio Medici* (published in 1642, but probably written some six years earlier), *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* (otherwise known as *Vulgar Errors*—1646), *Hydriotaphia* or *Urn Burial* and *The Garden of Cyrus* (both 1658), and the posthumously published *Christian Morals*. Although in *Religio Medici* Browne has not reached his full strength, its best prose has his characteristic splendour and richness. In it he declares the faith that is in him, and shows this to be orthodox, yet independent and discriminating. He loves science, yet will not allow it to cramp or condition belief. 'To believe only possibilities', he says, 'is not faith but mere philosophy.' If we accept his own assurance—and we have no right to reject it—his personal faith was not only positive but intense. 'I have so fixed my contemplations on Heaven', he says, 'that I have almost forgot the idea of Hell.' He believes, moreover, in much that is not now considered essential to orthodoxy: in guardian angels, who know 'by their forms' things which men know only by their accidents and

Baxter,  
Barrow,  
South.

Sir  
Thomas  
Browne  
—*Religio  
Medici*.



properties ; and in spirits sent forth by the devil to frequent cemeteries, charnel-houses, and other 'dormitories of the dead'. Elsewhere, however, he gives his scepticism free play ; he opposes the literal interpretation of the Scriptures, and declares : 'to me the world is but a dream or mock-show, and we all therein but pantalones or antics, to my severer contemplations.' From this dream, however, there was a sure release : 'there is but one comfort left, that though it be in the power of the weakest arm to take away life, it is not in the strongest to deprive us of death.' On this antinomy of faith and doubt hangs the whole of Browne's thought. But he perhaps becomes most fascinating when he tells us, with the frankness of Montaigne and a fervour and splendour all his own, of himself and his relations to his kind. The passages in which he praises charity and friendship are among the finest in his prose, and are the truest revelation of his brooding, humorous, and lovable soul.

The *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* is at once the most humorous and the most sceptical of Browne's works, though his scepticism is applied not so much to the destruction of belief as to the establishment of its true boundaries. The text of his work is this sentence from its preface : 'therefore in this Encyclopaedia and round of knowledge, like the great and exemplary wheels of heaven, we must observe two circles : that while we are daily carried about and whirled on by the swing and rapt of one, we may maintain a natural and proper course in the slow and sober wheel of the other.' After chronicling some of the general sources of error—as 'credulity and supinity', 'adherence unto antiquity and authority', and so forth—Browne proceeds, with evident gusto, to an enumeration of its peculiar instances. His own knowledge and practice of science fitted him to criticize the scientific errors which he chronicles. For most modern readers the book's chief charm lies in its stores of strange information, and in Browne's comments, which are sometimes satirical, sometimes naïve, and often wholly delightful. He holds that the eye of a basilisk may well be able to kill at a distance, but dismisses the belief that the creature 'proceedeth from a cock's egg hatched under a toad or serpent' as 'a conceit as monstrous as the brood itself'. He once hung up a dead kingfisher in an air-tight glass to see whether it would act as a reliable weathercock. He refutes the contention that elephants have no joints in their legs, and therefore sleep leaning against trees ; and he opposes with characteristic irony the belief that bay-leaves will protect their wearer against lightning : 'although Tiberius for this intent did wear a laurel about his temples, yet did Augustus take a more probable course, who fled under arches and hollow vaults for protection.' Though the *Vulgar Errors* has seldom the gorgeous beauty of Browne's highest prose, it in nowise lacks that rich quaintness which is so endearing a feature of his style.

*Pseudo-  
doxia Epi-  
demica.*

*Urn Burial* and *The Garden of Cyrus*. Perhaps his greatest prose is to be found in the volume which comprises *Hydriotaphia* and *The Garden of Cyrus*. *Hydriotaphia*, or *Urn Burial*, is primarily a discourse 'upon the sepulchral urns lately found in Norfolk'. After examining the practice of urn-burial historically, and with a wealth of antiquarian detail, Browne discusses sepulture generally, and then passes to the wider questions of death and immortality, concluding his reflections with a passage of sustained and fervid splendour. His prose has now reached its full strength and scope, and achieves such beauty as this :

'But the iniquity of oblivion blindly scattereth her poppy, and deals with the memory of men without distinction to merit of perpetuity.'

and this :

'But the long habit of living indisposeth us for dying . . . adversity stretcheth our days, misery makes Alcmena's nights, and time hath no wings unto it' ;

and this :

'Tis all one to lie in St. Innocent's churchyard as in the sands of Egypt ; ready to be anything in the ecstasy of being ever, and as content with six foot as the mole of Adrianus.'

*The Garden of Cyrus* is a dissertation on the 'quincuncial, lozenge, or net-work plantations of the ancients, artificially (i. e. artistically), naturally, mystically considered'. It resolves itself into a general examination of the quincunx or figure five, arranged in the form it takes on the surface of a die. Browne pursues the quincunx through the whole world of art and Nature, and illustrates the quest with his quaintest and most characteristic figures of fancy, till he concludes in the great and famous passage beginning, 'But the quincunx of Heaven runs low'.

Browne's remaining work consists of his letters and his treatise on *Christian Morals*. The relative inferiority of this last work is doubtless in some sense due to his not having revised it personally. Yet even so, some of its passages are worthy to stand beside his best. His prose owes much of its incomparable cadence and glow to his love of Latin words, which he adopts freely when he finds them to his purpose, and invents with hardly less freedom when adoption fails him. Yet many who have Latinized have marred their prose instead of moulding it into exquisiteness ; and his triumph is ultimately due to his superb tact of phrasing, his mastery of both the larger and the subtler prose harmonies, and the mystical fervour which wings his highest flights. His ornateness is not affectation ; it is the expression of his own rich and various personality. In no man's prose has there been more 'fundamental brain-work' ; and if we could adopt Shelley's view of poetry, Browne would be one of the great poets of his century.

Lord Herbert of Cherbury (1583-1648), brother of George Herbert, wrote a *History of Henry VIII*, which has considerable



merit, and also left various philosophic treatises in Latin, the chief of which are *De Veritate* and *Religio Laici*. But his most widely read, and most readable, book is his *Autobiography*, which remained in manuscript till Horace Walpole published it in 1764. Herbert was proud of his learning, and of his prowess as a duellist and a lady-killer; there is an amiable fatuousness in his account of his first meeting with Elizabeth, and in his subsequent remark: 'I could tell how much my person was commended by the lords and ladies that came to see the solemnity then used, but I shall flatter myself too much if I believe it.'

Historians during this period were fairly numerous, but only one has left work of high literary merit. Edward Hyde, Earl of Clarendon (1608-1674), wrote the early part of his *History of the Great Rebellion* during his exile in Scilly between the years 1646 and 1648, and the later parts at Montpellier after he had been finally exiled from England in 1667. To this period also belongs his *Life*, a justification of his political career, portions of which he eventually inserted in the body of the *History*. Clarendon's style is in the main simple, clear, and dignified, yet it shows occasional unwieldiness and seldom achieves the highest eloquence. His vivid narrative power is evident in the pages in which he describes Montrose's death, the escape and flight of Charles II, and bull-fighting as he saw it at Madrid. But his genius is at its highest in his portraits of the great characters of his age—Strafford, Laud, Hampden, Pym, Montrose, Argyle, Charles I himself, and many a one more. He never did anything finer than his portrait of Falkland, surrounded by the chosen spirits who dwelt with him at Great Tew 'as in a college situated in a purer air: so that his house was a university in less volume'. There is deep feeling in his reference to Falkland as 'a person of such prodigious parts of learning and knowledge, of that inimitable sweetness and delight in conversation, of so flowing and obliging a humanity and goodness to mankind, and of that primitive simplicity and integrity of life that if there were no other brand upon this odious and accursed civil war than that single loss, it must be most infamous and execrable to posterity'.

Clarendon.

Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) holds in the philosophy of the period the same place of eminence that Clarendon holds in its history. A good scholar, he translated Thucydides in his youth, and Homer in his old age, and followed the example of his master, Bacon, by writing much of his philosophic work in Latin. Our chief interest, however, is not with this, but with his English works, the greatest of which is the famous *Leviathan* (1651). The sub-title of the book indicates that its chief aim was to describe 'the matter, form, and power of a Commonwealth, Ecclesiastical and Civil'; but it opens with a discussion of man and natural law, and Hobbes here develops the mechanical explanation which he had offered of the whole

Hobbes.

universe, in opposition to Descartes, who had exempted mind from the operation of the mechanism controlling matter. To Hobbes, a state of Nature was a state of equality, and hence of distrust and warfare, since 'from equality of ability arises equality of hope in the attaining of our ends: and therefore if any two men desire the same thing, which nevertheless they cannot both enjoy, they become enemies.' Man, this creature of unruly passions and selfish desires, could only cease to be dangerous to his kind through firm and steady government: and such government, thought Hobbes, could not be found outside a monarchy. He develops his theory of the state with great imaginative power and cogency. His prose is clear and dignified, and its natural force is often augmented by weighty epigram. He was not only a great thinker, but a great man of letters. Apart from *Leviathan*, his chief English works are his treatise on *Human Nature* (1650) and his *Questions concerning Liberty, Necessity, and Chance* (1656).

Harrington.

James Harrington (1611-1677) was as keen a speculator in sociology as Hobbes, and his *Oceana* was described by Hume as 'the only valuable model of a commonwealth' extant. When he says that 'where there is inequality of power there can be no true commonwealth', he seems to be more of a democrat than Hobbes; but he was not, and indeed, at his age, could not have been, a democrat in the modern sense; and the 'equality' which he advocates ultimately depends on a balance between different classes. *Oceana* has of late been undeservedly disparaged: it is thoughtful, for the most part readable, and often quaintly delightful.

Fuller.

Thomas Fuller (1608-1661), in his love of quips and 'conceits', has something in common with both Herbert and Donne, yet he wore his coat of many colours with a difference and more flippantly, often flaunting it as motley. A keen antiquary and student of history, he is cherished by posterity not for his erudition, but for the charm of his prose, which abounds in quaint sallies and epigrams, with here and there a deeply imaginative phrase. His rare quality won for his writings the admiration and affection of Coleridge and Charles Lamb. His best known and most characteristic works are his *Holy and Profane States* (1642), and his posthumously published *Worthies of England*. Less popular, yet notable, are his sermons, his very long *Church History* (1655), and his *Good Thoughts in Bad Times*, written in 1645, at the darkest moment of the Civil War.

Walton.

The name of Izaak Walton (1593-1683) is hardly less dear to Englishmen than that of Charles Lamb: in both men there is the same rare charm of spirit, reflecting itself in easy and intensely personal prose. Walton's most famous work is *The Compleat Angler*, first published in 1653, and reissued in 1676 with a supplement by his disciple, Charles Cotton. None save anglers will appreciate to the full the cunning means he outlines for taking the 'chavender or chub', the 'minnow



or penk', and the 'bull-head or miller's thumb': yet all may enjoy the delightful passages which light up the book, even in its most technical pages. Many of Walton's statements might have furnished texts for Browne's *Pseudodoxia Epidemica*: he favours the opinion that pike are bred of pickerel-weed, as well as by ordinary generation, and that 'the tench is the physician of fishes, of the pike especially, and that the pike being either sick or hurt is cured by the touch of the tench'. But it is not for his credulity that men cherish him, nor yet for his craft and learning, but for the quaint and lovable personality evident in every sentence of the *Angler*, as throughout the *Lives* of Wotton, Donne, Hooker, Herbert, and Sanderson, which make up the tale of his prose. With Walton we are already on the threshold of the Age of Dryden.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### JOHN DRYDEN AND THE POETRY AND DRAMA OF THE RESTORATION

New literary forces — Dryden's plays, poems, and prose — His relation to his age — Developments in Restoration drama — The Heroic Play — Restoration Comedy: Etherege, Wycherley, Congreve, Vanbrugh, Farquhar, Shadwell and others — Restoration Tragedy: Davenant and others, Lee, Otway, Southerne, Rowe — Restoration Poetry — Butler, Oldham, Rochester, Sedley.

IN literature, as in life, the Elizabethan period had been one of mighty experiment and expansion, and had exhibited a play of forces probably unparalleled in any age or country. In the province of thought this expansion, as has been shown, was not the sequel of a steady and unbroken literary tradition, but was a sudden outburst consequent on the discovery of new treasures of art and thought. In creative literature, whether in poetry, drama, or prose, the impulse was towards freedom rather than order, and imagination was often pushed to the farthest boundaries. The interest in critical problems was acute, but, in the almost complete absence of good English models, it was necessarily tentative and wayward. Had the Elizabethan genius been more curbed and self-conscious, the world would have gone without Shakespeare and his fellows, who could never have written as they did save through that way of literary service which is perfect freedom. But there dwelt within the very flame of the great Elizabethan period 'a kind of wick or snuff' that must needs abate it. The resulting disintegration was none the less emphatic because many of its manifestations were magnificent. In all the literary kinds there were sure signs of decay. The licence which in Shakespeare's hands had made blank verse a vital and splendid thing, too often passed into lawlessness and chaos in those of

The Age of  
Dryden

his successors. A similar loosening of the couplet was being exultantly effected by men like Marmion and Chamberlayne. In lyric poetry, one group at least of writers had gone far toward smothering poetry in 'conceits', and had 'dodged conception to the very bourne of heaven'. From that effort came the glories of Donne, but also the lunacies of Benlowes.

There was the same uncertainty in prose; for all the splendours of Donne and Browne and Taylor, there had been evolved no sure form or medium of expression of the kind available to all men of genius in Augustan Rome or Augustan England, or in the France of our own day. Rich and various as were the beauties of our literature at this period, they are still beauties of the decadence: this much may be admitted by those who would be most loath to exchange them for the surer and more measured work that was to come. These conditions explain, and in large measure justify, the theory and practice of the succeeding age. New forces and new theories were struggling to birth. In all kinds of literature the impulse was toward reaction and fresh creation; and in almost all of these kinds the most typical and potent force, whether for creation or reaction, was John Dryden.

Dryden—  
Early  
Poetry.

Dryden has left work of considerable volume in poetry, drama, and prose; and in most of the kinds which he chose to handle he outdistanced all competitors. Reserving his prose, we may discuss his poems and plays together, with reference to the general literary tendencies of the day. His early lines *On the Death of Lord Hastings* are written in a form of heroic couplet strongly reminiscent of Donne's *Anniversaries*: they contain one at least of the most forced and extraordinary 'conceits' to be found in contemporary literature. His *Heroic Stanzas on the Death of Oliver Cromwell* (1659) were written in the decasyllabic quatrain to which he was to revert in the *Annus Mirabilis* (1666). They possess dignity and finish, but lack the strength and flow of the later and greater poem. The *Annus* has two main themes—the sea-victories over the Dutch in the 'year of wonders', and the Great Fire of London. In this poem Dryden's verse has learnt the sureness of which it was seldom afterwards to fail: the descriptions of the fighting are spirited, and many of the lines have a royal and splendid ring. In spite of Johnson's objection to them, we may instance these two, which hymn the future of British commerce:

Then we upon our globe's last verge shall go,  
And view the ocean leaning on the sky;

and these others, of the Fire:

The fire meantime walks in a broader gross;  
To either hand his wings he opens wide,  
He wades the streets and straight he reaches cross  
And plays his longing flames on th' other side.



At first they warm, then scorch, and then they take ;  
 Now with long necks from side to side they feed :  
 At length, grown strong, their mother-fire forsake,  
 And a new colony of flames succeed.

To every nobler portion of the town  
 The curling billows roll their restless tide :  
 In parties now they straggle up and down,  
 As armies, unopposed, for prey divide.

To the same period belong certain poems of courtly compliment, the most important of which is *Astraea Redux*, 'on the happy restoration and return' of Charles II.

Between the years 1666 and 1681 Dryden wrote very little pure poetry and a great deal of drama. For the better understanding of his plays, a word must here be said concerning the general tendencies of contemporary English drama. In view of the almost complete cessation of theatrical production during the years 1642-1660, it was inevitable that the new plays should differ notably, both in style and spirit, from the old. A link between the two epochs is to be found in the work of men like Davenant and Killigrew, who wrote for the English stage both before and after the interregnum. The masterpieces of the older writers were, moreover, constantly revived, the favourites of the Restoration playgoer being Shakespeare, Fletcher, and Jonson. The new drama, too, whether comic or tragic, was influenced at every turn by the practice of the older men: thus the Jonsonian comedy of humours was revived by Shadwell and Wilson; Fletcher's influence appears in productions so diverse as Davenant's *Siege of Rhodes*, and Dryden's *Wild Gallant*; and Shakespeare was constantly copied and adapted, with results ranging from the monstrous dislocations and distortions effected by Crowne and Tate, to that triumphant rehandling of him which appears in Dryden's *All for Love*. The native tradition, therefore, remained varied but unbroken, and must be regarded as by far the most important factor in the new drama. Yet that drama was also markedly affected by certain foreign influences which had been either unfelt, or only partly felt, by the older playwrights. Important among these was Spanish drama: the comedies of Calderon stood Tuke and Wycherley in as good stead as the novels of Cervantes had previously stood Fletcher. Still stronger, both in comedy and tragedy, was the influence of France. As was but natural, the outstanding model in comedy was Molière, whose early dramatic triumphs had been achieved in the years immediately preceding the Restoration. His influence is evident in the work of nearly every English comic dramatist of the period, from Dryden to Crowne: a notable example of it is Wycherley's *Plain Dealer*, which is a vigorous rehandling of *Le Misanthrope*. In tragedy the main influence was Corneille, whose *Cid* had been performed in England, in translation, before the closing of the theatres, and whose

Restoration  
 Drama.

*Pompée* was played in Dublin in 1663, in the rendering of Katherine Phillips. Corneille's dramas, as will be seen, had a marked effect on the dramatic practice of Dryden and his contemporaries. A further French influence, which especially affected the history of the English heroic play, was the lengthy prose romance, as practised by La Calprenède and Madeleine de Scudéry, which had a vast popularity in France toward the middle of the seventeenth century.

Dryden's  
Early  
Plays.

Dryden's dramatic work covers nearly every contemporary kind. The first play of his to be acted was *The Wild Gallant* (1663), a moderately successful prose comedy reproducing the free speech and morals of the time. His greatest strength, as he knew and admitted, did not lie in comedy: yet his chief remaining plays in this kind—*Marriage à la Mode* (1672), *Limberham* (1678), and *Amphitryon* (1690) are brilliantly written and had considerable success with the public. Their coarseness, though it drew down upon Dryden the censure of Jeremy Collier, is inseparable from the manners of the time.

Dryden's comedies, as has been seen, were produced at various stages of his career. His second acted play was *The Rival Ladies* (1664), a tragi-comedy partly verse, partly prose. Before the closing of the theatres, tragi-comedy had reached its greatest triumphs in the hands of Fletcher and Shakespeare. Dryden helped to sustain the tradition with several plays, chief among which are *Secret Love* (1667), and *The Spanish Friar* (1681), which contains an admirably racy underplot. But brilliant as these productions were, Dryden's most characteristic work was done in other kinds than comedy.

His Heroic  
Plays.

*The Indian Emperor* (1665) is the first 'heroic play' due to his unaided authorship; and it is the beginning of a splendid series. Throughout the plays of this class and period, Dryden employed the rhyming couplet, which he had already used tentatively in *The Rival Ladies*. As a dramatic medium, the couplet doubtless owed much of its contemporary English vogue to the brilliant example of the French Alexandrine, though there was already abundant precedent for rhymed dramatic verse in Elizabethan drama. Dryden, however, did for the reformed couplet much the same service that Marlowe had done for blank verse: though not the first to admit it in drama, he was the first to use it freely on the public stage. Neither in France nor in England had it at this period been broken up for purposes of dramatic dialogue or narrative after the fashion now familiar in the practice of Hugo and Rostand and Swinburne. The resulting regularity of beat may have helped the 'heroic play' to its peculiar stateliness, but it also made against variety and flexibility and naturalness. Naturalness was, however, in the very order of things somewhat at a discount in the 'heroic play', which in style and subject not only ensued the supernatural, but rejected, as far as it might, every manifestation of the normal. The heroic characters of Elizabethan drama had constantly transcended the action and utterance of



common life ; but they had not lost touch with them : rather by keeping touch had they transfigured them. But the 'heroic play' not only strove to transcend them : it shunned them as unworthy, and aimed at the creation of supermen and a super-speech. 'Prithee undo this button', the familiar words which intensify the grandeur of Lear's last moments, would have been regarded as unfit for the most prosaic passage of *The Conquest of Granada*. And as a reading of this play and *Aurengzebe* will show, the unreality of the 'heroic' convention affected not merely language but character. The 'heroic' type and the 'heroic' way of writing were doubtless immediately suggested to the Restoration playwright by such famous French prose romances as *Le Grand Cyrus* and *Almahide* ; but here again there is a danger of exaggerating the foreign influence, and it must not be forgotten that the English stage had already been trodden by the heroic figures of Tamburlaine and Zenocrate.

The chief heroic plays which succeeded *The Indian Emperor* were *Tyrannic Love* (1669), *The Conquest of Granada* (produced in two parts, 1669 and 1670), and *Aurengzebe* (1676). In all of these there is the same strained exaltation of character, the same swift yet mechanical dialogue, and the same brazen clangour and beat of verse. In the best Greek and Shakespearean tragedy the spectator is held spellbound by his sense that the doom of the chief characters might well have been his own. In Dryden's heroic plays this illusion would be impossible unless the beholder could transport himself into a wonder-world where all life was as tremendous as it was mechanical. In language, too, there is the same alternation between the grand and the artificial ; and in not a few cases artificiality has become absurdity, as when Almanzor says, in all seriousness, of his beloved :

'Tis false : she is not ill, nor can she be ;  
She must be chaste because she's loved by me.

Yet in scene after scene the language has the valiancy of Aurengzebe's reference to Arimant :

Did he, my slave, presume to look so high ?  
That crawling insect, who from mud began,  
Warmed by my beams, and kindled into man.

To Aurengzebe, too, is given a still more great and famous passage—that beginning 'When I consider life, 'tis all a cheat'.

Mention may here be made of the remarkable comedy or *The Re-skit*, *The Rehearsal* (1670), written to parody heroic plays in general, and particularly those of Dryden, whom it satirized under the name of Bayes. Several writers, including Buckingham, and, it is said, Butler, had a hand in this piece, which is written with skill and spirit, and contains some shrewd hits at the 'heroic' style.

At this period Dryden not only wrote plays in rhyme, but

defended the practice in his *Essays of Dramatic Poesy*, and of *Heroic Plays*. In the Prelude to *Aurengzebe*, however, he tells us that he

has now another taste of wit,  
And to confess a truth, though out of time,  
Grows weary of his long-loved mistress, Rhyme.

He further confesses that

a secret shame  
Invades his breast at Shakespeare's sacred name.

Dryden's Tragedies. This reaction finds expression in the tragedies which follow, where he uses blank verse, and also adopts Shakespeare's themes, as in *All for Love* (1677) and his rehandling of *Troilus and Cressida* (printed 1679). His *Troilus* is hardly more successful than the travesty of *The Tempest* which he had published in 1670; but in *All for Love*, though its theme is that of *Antony and Cleopatra*, Dryden has not merely copied or adapted Shakespeare, but has produced an original play, less vast and exquisite indeed than the earlier drama, but more realistic and closely knit. The finest of his remaining tragedies are *Don Sebastian* (acted 1690) and *Cleomenes* (acted 1692). He also wrote a rhymed opera on the subject of *Paradise Lost* and another on King Arthur; and in two plays he co-operated with Nathaniel Lee.

His Satires. Having surveyed the course of Dryden's drama, we may return to his poetry, and discuss the great satires of which *Absalom and Achitophel* (Part I, 1681) is the earliest and most powerful. Using the poetic convention of the time, by which the return of Charles II to his country was likened to that of the youthful David, Dryden pillories, under scriptural names, the chief advocates of the Exclusion Bill and enemies of the Catholic succession. *Absalom and Achitophel* owes its greatness—and it is the greatest verse satire in our language—to its author's Olympian aloofness, to the fact that he neither preaches nor scolds, nor indulges spite nor hate, to the curious suggestion of fairness that accompanies some of his deadliest lines, to the impression, in fine, that he is writing satire in 'calm of mind, all passion spent'. His couplet has now achieved superb strength and freedom, and runs its course exultantly. There is relentless power in the portraits of Achitophel (Shaftesbury), Zimri (Buckingham), Shimei (Sir Slingsby Bethel), and Corah (Titus Oates). Slightly less great than *Absalom* is *The Medal, a Satire against Sedition*, directed against the arch-intriguer, Shaftesbury. The Whig playwright, Thomas Shadwell, wrote one of the numerous replies to *The Medal*, and drew down upon himself the deadly and racy satire of Dryden's *Mac Flecknoe*, in which he is represented as succeeding the tedious playwright Flecknoe in his rule over 'the realms of Nonsense'. The 'aged prince' speaks thus of his successor and son:

'Tis resolved; for Nature pleads that he  
Should only rule who most resembles me.



Shadwell alone my perfect image bears,  
 Mature in dulness from his tender years :  
 Shadwell alone, of all my sons, is he  
 Who stands confirmed in full stupidity.  
 The rest to some faint meaning make pretence,  
 But Shadwell never deviates into sense.  
 Some beams of wit on other souls may fall,  
 Strike through, and make a lucid interval :  
 But Shadwell's genuine night admits no ray,  
 His rising fogs prevail upon the day.

There is more personal gusto and venom here than in the first part of *Absalom* ; and the same quality is evident in the portraits of Doeg (Settle) and Og (Shadwell), which Dryden contributed to *Absalom and Achitophel, Part Second*, a satire mainly from the hand of Nahum Tate.

The strong intellectual basis of all Dryden's best poetry is nowhere more evident than in the two poems, *Religio Laici* (1682), and *The Hind and the Panther* (1687), in which he declares the successive stages of his religious faith. *Religio* was written before his conversion to Roman Catholicism, *The Hind and the Panther* after it : yet already in the earlier poem there are indications of the coming change. Its opening passage, stating the grounds for religious belief, is one of the finest things in Dryden. *The Hind and the Panther* is in form a fable, illustrating the differences between the English and Roman Catholic churches ; but the original allegorical theme is not strictly maintained and, in the third part, two fresh fables are introduced with admirable effect. The first book contains the famous and splendid confessional passage beginning 'My thoughtless youth'. The whole poem is full of brilliant epigram, and of portraiture vivid as that of the Presbyterian wolf :

with belly gaunt and famished face ;  
 Never was so deformed a beast of grace.  
 His ragged tail betwixt his legs he wears,  
 Close-clapp'd for shame ; but his rough crest he rears  
 And pricks up his predestinating ears.

Again, we are told that the leaders of dissent

like wild horses, several ways have whirl'd  
 The tortur'd text about the Christian world.

To the vast volume of his general work, Dryden added translation : his highest achievement here was his version of Virgil. A remarkable effort of his genius came toward the end of his life in the paraphrases of Chaucer and Boccaccio, which he entitled *Fables Ancient and Modern*. These were written in the couplet form, with all his old vigour and ease.

Dryden's lyric gift finds expression in his Odes, and in the songs which are scattered throughout his plays. The stately *Song for St. Cecilia's Day* (1687) and *Alexander's Feast* (1697) are universally known : less famous, but among his

His Re-  
 ligious  
 Poems.

His Odes  
 and Songs.

very finest things, is his Pindaric *Ode to the Pious Memory of Mrs. Anne Killigrew*. He has not the passionate fervour of Crashaw, nor the strangeness and depth of Donne; and he can be guilty both of frigidity and extravagance. Though his lyric at its best is majestic and exquisite, his fame depends ultimately on his use of the couplet, which he has handled with a strength and largeness unparalleled in our literature.

His Prose.

It has already been remarked that if English prose throughout the early seventeenth century possessed much splendour and strength, it had so far evolved no sure and universal medium of expression. To attribute to Dryden alone the creation of such a medium would be to ignore the just claims of men like Temple and Halifax; but he certainly did more than any single man towards purging English prose of its 'conceits' and exaggerations, and evolving a form of it which should be at once strong, easy, clear, and dignified. Apart from translations, Dryden's prose consists almost entirely of essays. Many of these he published as prefaces to his plays, after a fashion which he learnt from Corneille. His most famous prose work, however, the *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* (1668), was published as a separate work in reply to certain views put forward by his brother-in-law, Sir Robert Howard. In form it is a dialogue, and in effect a masterpiece. Its estimates of Jonson, Fletcher, and Shakespeare would be alone sufficient to prove Dryden one of the greatest among English critics. Particularly illuminating is his defence of the rhyming dramatic couplet, and his examination of contemporary dramatic practice. Among Dryden's chief remaining essays are those on *Heroic Plays*, on *Heroic Poetry*, and *Poetic License*, and on the *Grounds of Criticism in Tragedy*; but more masterly than any of these is the *Preface to the Fables*, which has all the strength and ease of the *Essay on Dramatic Poesy*, with a new intimacy and charm, in some sense due, as Dryden himself tells us, to his reading of Montaigne. In the *Preface* this splendid veteran has left some of his greatest literary criticism, and a fascinating account of his life's effort and achievement. Such a passage as the following displays the instinct of a consummate man of letters: 'Thoughts, such as they are, come crowding in so fast upon me that my only difficulty is to choose or to reject, to run them into verse, or to give them the other harmony of prose: I have so long studied and practised both, that they are grown into a habit, and become familiar to me.'

Mention has already been made of the general influences, native and foreign, which helped to determine Restoration drama. It now remains to consider that drama in its main kinds, the chief of which is undoubtedly comedy. Despite the prohibition of play-acting during the Commonwealth, comedy had still been performed from time to time, chiefly in the form of the 'droll', a kind of seventeenth-century *revue*, or adaptation of scenes in well-known contemporary plays. Immediately

Minor  
Comic  
Play-  
wrights.



after the Restoration there was an eager recurrence to the Jonsonian tradition, which is evident in *The Cheats* (1662), and *The Projectors* (1664) of John Wilson, and in the two surviving comedies of the Duke of Newcastle. One of Jonson's favourite dramatic themes had been ridicule of the Puritans: in such comedies as *The Rump* (1660) by John Tatham, and *The Old Troop* (1663 ?) by John Lacy, this reappears under a new lease, and with an added vehemence due to the political hatred of the time. This theme is again exploited in Cowley's *Cutter of Coleman Street*. This play, despite its strained plot, remains readable chiefly owing to the tricks of the 'sharking' Cutter, who to gain the hand of the non-conforming Tabitha Barebottle, affects a Puritanical lingo, fully worthy of *Bartholomew Fair*. Obviously, however, neither love of Jonson nor hatred of the Puritans could provide a sufficient source or motive for a flourishing comedy.

Before we look elsewhere for such a motive, and discuss the greater comic playwrights of the Restoration, a word must be said concerning the charge of licentiousness commonly levelled against them. This, as will be seen, originates with Jeremy Collier, but in the hands of later writers it becomes largely an attempt to appraise seventeenth-century dramatic art by a purely moral standard—and that standard an early Victorian one. Macaulay's essay on *The Comic Dramatists of the Restoration* did more than anything towards perpetuating this injustice,<sup>1</sup> which has been repudiated explicitly or implicitly by the men of his period best qualified to judge—Lamb, Hazlitt, Coleridge, and Leigh Hunt. 'I do not know how it is with others,' says Lamb, 'but I feel the better always for the perusal of one of Congreve's—nay, why should I not add, even of Wycherley's—comedies. I am the gayer at least for it; and I could never connect those sports of a witty fancy in any shape with any result to be drawn from them to imitation in real life. They are a world of themselves, almost as much as fairyland. The Fainalls and the Mirabells, the Dorimants and the Lady Touchwoods, in their own sphere do not offend my moral sense: in fact they do not appeal to it at all. They seem engaged in their proper element. They break through no laws and conscientious restraints. They know of none.' The values of life are not always or precisely the values of art; and unless Lamb's words are marked and understood, the true significance of Etherege, Wycherley, Congreve, Vanbrugh, and Farquhar must remain ungrasped.

Sir George Etherege (1635 ?-1691 ?), familiar through Steele's affectionate obituary essay on him to many who have not read his plays, has left three comedies, *Love in a Tub* (1664), *She Would if She Could* (1668), and *The Man of Mode, or Sir Fopling Flutter* (1676). All of these have intrigue for their theme, and deal with contemporary manners: the first,

<sup>1</sup> See *The Comedy of Manners*, by John Palmer, which contains a brilliant defence of the Restoration playwrights.

Restora-  
tion  
Comedy.

Etherege.

which is part prose, part verse, is immature and unshapely, but provides a great deal of rollicking fun in the adventures of Sir Frederick Frolick. *She Would if She Could* shows better construction and an easy command of dialogue: its morals, though different from our own, are certainly not below the contemporary standard. But Etherege's best and wittiest play was his last, which contains, in Dorimant and Sir Fopling Flutter, two of the most successful comic characters of the period. Sir Fopling, whose name precisely indicates his nature, is forerunner to a long and brilliant series of stage beaux and men about town. 'Easy' Etherege had a light heart and a fairly light hand. He was the first of the splendid Restoration amateurs who deigned to write a few plays of genius in the intervals of fashionable life. He is concerned with manners, not with morals; his plays carry none of the social criticism implicit in the comedy of Molière. He is important historically as having helped to set the mould of Restoration comedy.

Wycher-  
ley.

Etherege prepared the way for a more important figure, William Wycherley (1640–1715), whose fame depends on his four comedies, *Love in a Wood* (produced in 1671), *The Gentleman Dancing-Master* (1671), *The Country Wife* (1673), and *The Plain Dealer* (1674). Though Wycherley's life was long—he was born nine years after Dryden, and lived to be the friend of Pope—it will be seen that his dramatic activity was limited to five or six years. Like Etherege and Congreve he was an amateur in letters. In early manhood he lived the life of a courtier and man of fashion, and became the favourite of the Duchess of Cleveland and the husband of the Countess of Drogheda. His experience of fashionable life helped him greatly with his plays, which are all comedies of manners. *Love in a Wood* is immature, but presents the amusing Mr. Dapperwit, 'a brisk conceited half-witted fellow of the town', a type already frequent, despite superficial differences, in Elizabethan comedy. Alderman Gripe in this play is of the family of Overreach and Volpone, and the strong, angry drawing that has gone to his creation is typical of Wycherley in certain moods. *The Gentleman Dancing-Master* was suggested by Calderon's *El Maestro de Danzar*, but the handling is Wycherley's own. The play is a slight comedy of intrigue, but is superior in construction to its predecessor.

Wycherley's strongest work, however, is to be found in his last two comedies. The plot of *A Country Wife* may not be related here, and the play had to suffer bowdlerization even in Garrick's not over-fastidious generation. It is entirely innocent of the moral purpose subsequently assigned to it by Steele.<sup>1</sup> Its debt to two comedies of Molière—*L'École des Femmes* and *L'École des Maris*—is wholly superficial: the soul and substance of it are Wycherley's own. Those of our own generation who can find the level of Lamb and Hazlitt,

<sup>1</sup> *Tatler*, April 16, 1709.



and see it with their eyes, will confess it to be one of the most racy and engrossing comedies in the language. Still more powerful work appears in *The Plain Dealer*, from whose leading character Wycherley derived his sobriquet of 'Manly'. Much of this play is very amusing, and Voltaire has described the 'petulant, litigious Widow Blackacre' as 'the most comical character ever brought upon the stage'. More characteristic, however, is the strong, dark work which has gone to the drawing of Manly, the 'honourable misanthrope'—work which shows Wycherley in the mood of a Juvenal, lashing through his creation a vice in which he seems absorbingly interested. It was this feature of the play which led Dryden to describe it as one of 'the most bold, most general, and most useful satires which has ever been presented in the English theatre'. The central theme is undoubtedly borrowed from Molière, yet in all essentials Wycherley's play is a new thing; and we have Voltaire's testimony that if its strokes are less delicate than those of *Le Misanthrope*, they are also stronger and bolder.

William Congreve (1670–1729) received his loftiest, and Congreve. on the whole his truest, tribute from the prefatory verses contributed by Dryden to his 'dear friend's' play, *The Double Dealer*:

In him all beauties of this age we see,  
 Etherege his courtship, Southerne's purity,  
 The satire, wit, and strength of manly Wycherley,  
 All this in blooming youth you have achieved.  
 Nor are your foiled contemporaries grieved,  
 So much the sweetness of your manners move,  
 We cannot envy you because we love.

The reference to Congreve's 'sweetness of manners' is no idle compliment: it is confirmed by all who knew him; and nearly all of these seem to have shared Dryden's love for him. Like his two predecessors, he left only a handful of plays—*The Old Bachelor* and *The Double Dealer* (1693), *Love for Love* (1695), *The Mourning Bride* (1697), and *The Way of the World* (1700). *The Mourning Bride* is a tragedy which would have remained unnoticed by posterity but for the extravagant eulogy of Johnson, who declared that its description of the temple might be styled 'the most poetical paragraph in English poetry'.

Congreve's attitude toward his plays is typical of his time and set, and is attested by Voltaire, who visited him shortly before his death: 'He spoke of his works as trifles that were beneath him, and hinted to me in our first conversation that I should visit him on no other footing than that of a gentleman who lived a life of plainness and simplicity.' Though Congreve carries on the great tradition set by Etherege and Wycherley, it is notable that a considerable interval intervenes between his best work and theirs. During that interval there had been a marked sophistication of English life and manners. The result is reflected in Congreve's comedies, which are at once

more artificial and more exquisite than anything that had gone before. His characters envisage life as curiously as Wycherley's but with less joy. His men of pleasure savour vice with the sharp passionless gusto of the connoisseur. Addison justly says of Heartwell, the character who gives his name to *The Old Bachelor*, that he 'neither languishes nor burns, but frets for love'. Similarly Congreve's heroines—notably Angelica in *Love for Love*, and Millamant in *The Way of the World*—wellnigh smother their true capacity for feeling with a show of worldliness and wit. Millamant, the superb and unforgettable, is the very Cleopatra of comedy: she holds all hearts from the moment when Mirabell describes her first entry: 'Here she comes, i' faith, full sail, with her fan spread and her streamers out, and a shoal of fools for tenders.' Millamant and Mirabell wage the duel of sex less vehemently, perhaps, than Beatrice and Benedick, but with weapons of finer edge. Though Wycherley and Vanbrugh at their best achieve greater comic force than Congreve, neither can compass the perfection of his dialogue. Meredith has done him justice, perhaps more than justice, in a passage of his *Essay on Comedy*, where the estimate of his style is admirably sane and true: 'Where Congreve excels all his English rivals is in his literary force, and a succinctness of style peculiar to him. He hits the mean of a fine style and a natural in dialogue. He is at once precise and voluble. If you have ever thought upon style, you will acknowledge it to be a singular accomplishment. In this he is a classic, and worthy of treading a measure with Molière.'

Vanbrugh. When we turn from Congreve to Sir John Vanbrugh (1666–1726) we find a notable falling off in style. Vanbrugh's life was a busier one than Congreve's; and perhaps this fact, no less than natural idiosyncrasy, may account for his more rough-and-ready way of writing. In 1697 was acted his first play, *The Relapse*, which contains his best known, though not his greatest, character. Colley Cibber had already drawn an amusing fop, Sir Novelty Fashion, in his comedy, *Love's Last Shift*. Vanbrugh took this character and remoulded him into Lord Foppington, a comic creation of the first order. The description of his day's round given by Foppington in the second act of this play is a racy caricature of the life led by a contemporary beau; and the remaining scenes in which he appears are developed with corresponding power and brilliancy. Two other most amusing characters are Sir Tun-belly Clumsy and his daughter Hoyden; but the scenes in which they figure are unskilfully connected with those introducing the more seriously—and dully—drawn Loveless and Amanda. Vanbrugh's next play, *The Provoked Wife* (1697), contains his greatest creation, Sir John Brute, a sinister rake, exulting in the will to evil. 'I would not give a fig for a song', says Sir John, 'that is not full of sin and impudence.' The opening scene in which he heaps contempt upon his patient wife is written with great power. *The Provoked Wife* is more



skilfully constructed than *The Relapse*, and the improvement is maintained in *The Confederacy*, the best of Vanbrugh's adaptations or translations from the French. Some of his finest work appears in his unfinished comedy, *A Journey to London*. If he cannot rival Congreve in style, he is fully his equal in natural comic power.

Despite the broadness of Vanbrugh's plays, they had shown occasional evidence of a sentimentalism almost unknown to his predecessors: this reappears at times in the comedies of George Farquhar (1678-1707), and has been held by some to mark the decline of Restoration comedy. Farquhar has left seven plays, which bear upon them the imprint of his good-humoured, happy-go-lucky personality. His first effort, *Love and a Bottle* (1698) has small merit, but enjoyed considerable contemporary success. *A Constant Couple, or A Trip to the Jubilee* (1699), and *Sir Harry Wildair* (1701) are notable for the appearance of the gallant who gives his name to the second play. Sir Harry, as played by Robert Wilks, became a very popular stage figure. Less skilfully drawn than Flutter or Foppington, he is credited with certain finer instincts which they lack; and this literary innovation corresponds with a growing change in national manners and outlook. Farquhar's best work is contained in his last two plays, *The Recruiting Officer* (1706) and *The Beaux' Stratagem* (1707). In *The Recruiting Officer* he has evidently reproduced something of the military experience he had gained at Shrewsbury; and he deserves credit for breaking with tradition and giving his comedy freshness and variety by removing it from the London scene. The play owes most of its liveliness to the portraits of Captain Plume, Sergeant Kite, and the adventurous damsel Silvia. But Farquhar's masterpiece is undoubtedly *The Beaux' Stratagem*. Its dialogue is sparkling, its plot ingenious and engaging; and it contains such admirable figures as the audacious pretending footman, Archer; Boniface, the archetype of all stage landlords; his daughter, Cherry; Gibbet, the highwayman; Squire Sullen and his 'humorous' servant, Scrub. Here again it has been remarked that Farquhar's characters—Aimwell and Archer, notably, and even Sullen himself—have more morality in their composition than can be found in their prototypes of the earlier comedy; and here, too, the trend of the time is clearly seen. Farquhar died at the height of his powers, when his dramatic genius had been going on from strength to strength: it is difficult to say what he might not have achieved had he lived.

The above account has dealt in succession with the chief Shadwell comic playwrights of the period: brief mention must now be made of certain minors who flourished throughout its different stages. Thomas Shadwell (1642-1692), poet laureate, Dryden's 'Og', and the hero of his *MacFlecknoe*, has left seventeen plays: most of these are coarse, and all are clumsy. He owes much to Molière, and was among those who tried to revive

the Jonsonian comedy of 'humours'. In *The Libertine* he dramatized the Don Juan story, and in *Timon* he mishandled Shakespeare, greatly to his own satisfaction. In his three best plays, *Epsom Wells* (1676), *Bury Fair* (1686), and *The Squire of Alsatia* (1689), he has left some lively pictures of contemporary life and manners. Scott drew largely on the last play for his *Fortunes of Nigel*. Thomas D'Urfe, literary hack and man of fashion, wrote a number of plays, ranging from farce to tragedy, which need not detain us here. Sir Charles Sedley has left several inferior tragedies, and two moderately good comedies, *The Mulberry Garden* (1668) and *Bellamira, or The Mistress* (1687). The first of these is adapted from Molière, the second from Terence. Best among the fairly numerous comedies of Aphra Behn are *The Rover, or the Banished Cavaliers* (published in two parts, 1677 and 1681) and *The City Heiress* (1682). Towards the end of the period the chief names in comedy are those of Colley Cibber (1671-1757) and Susannah Centlivre (1680-1722). Cibber, if he be not assured of immortality through his excellent *Apology for his Life*, will live for ever through the 'bad eminence' to which Pope raised him as successor to Theobald in *The Dunciad*. His comedies, though popular at the time, have little worth as literature. The most notable of them are *Love's Last Shift* and *The Careless Husband*. Mrs. Centlivre's best play is *A Bold Stroke for a Wife*.

Collier's  
Short  
View.

Mention may here be made of that curious treatise, *A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage* (1698), written by the Tory divine, Jeremy Collier (1650-1725), in a spirit exactly reflected by its name. The chief playwrights arraigned in it were Vanbrugh and Congreve, though Dryden was by no means forgotten. Its method of criticism is pharisaical and inferior, yet it attracted great attention in its day and occasioned much controversy. Though it cannot be regarded as having materially hastened the decline of the comedy of manners, which succumbed to more general and powerful forces, it is ultimately responsible for much censorious modern criticism of the Restoration playwrights.

Restora-  
tion Trag-  
edy—Dav-  
enant and  
others.

The tragedy of the period, though perhaps more individual than the comedy, is certainly less great. Something has already been said of the 'heroic' play, which had made its appearance even before the Restoration in *The Siege of Rhodes*, by Sir William Davenant (1606-1668). Davenant had commenced play-writing long before the closing of the theatres, with *Albovine* and other dramas. After the Restoration he several times adapted or mangled Shakespeare, and served the result upon the stage with musical accompaniments; and he also wrote a good tragi-comedy, *Love and Honour*. Other early writers of the heroic play are the Earl of Orrery and Sir William Killigrew. John Crowne (1640 ?-1703) wrote extensively in different kinds of drama. His best play, *Sir Courtly Nice* (1685), is a comedy, but he has left several tragedies,



including *The Destruction of Jerusalem* (1677), *Thyestes* (1681), and *Caligula* (1698). Elkanah Settle (1648–1724), Dryden's 'Doeg', wrote a number of heroic plays, the least despicable of which, *The Empress of Morocco*, was cried up for a while against Dryden's triumphs in this kind. A better playwright than either of the foregoing was Nathaniel Lee (1653 ?–1692), who wrote rhyming heroic plays, blank verse tragedies, and one tragi-comedy. Best in the first kind are *Nero* (1675) and *Sophonisba* (1676); in the second, *The Rival Queens* (1677), *Mithridates* (1678), and *Theodosius* (1680). Lee's style is wild and ranting: he has been over-praised by certain modern critics; but he did not lack poetry, and sometimes shows dramatic power.

The greatest tragic playwright of the period is undoubtedly Thomas Otway (1651–1685). Otway was an Oxford man, had failed as an actor, and was for some time in the Army. His first play was an unsuccessful tragedy, *Alcibiades* (1675), in which appeared the celebrated actress Mrs. Barry, for whom he entertained an unrewarded and life-long passion. He subsequently adapted two plays from the French, and in 1678 wrote his first comedy, *Friendship in Fashion*. He had little comic talent: his *Soldier's Fortune* (1681) is mediocre, and its sequel, *The Atheist* (1684), far below mediocrity. In tragedy his work is very uneven: few would praise his *Caius Marius* (1680); and his rhymed *Don Carlos* (1676), though it contains spirited passages, inevitably suffers by comparison with the masterpieces on the same theme by Schiller and Alfieri. His fame depends ultimately on two plays, *The Orphan* (1680) and *Venice Preserved* (1682). In *The Orphan*, Polydore impersonates his twin-brother Castalio, and thus wins the last favour from Castalio's loving bride, Monimia. This cruel situation and its tragic sequel are developed with psychological insight and tragic force. But Otway's greatest and most famous play is *Venice Preserved*. Here, the tragic conflict is waged in the soul of Jaffier, who is distracted between the claims of his beloved fellow-conspirators and the plea of his passionately worshipped wife, Belvidera, whose father's life is threatened by their schemes. The scenes between Jaffier, Belvidera, and Pierre, Belvidera's rival for Jaffier's soul, are developed with moving power. It is difficult to share Taine's enthusiasm for the comic scenes in this play: on the other hand, the criticism<sup>1</sup> is surely mistaken which denies poetry to him who gave to the distracted Belvidera the lines beginning, 'Come, come, come', or inspired Pierre to say, in the course of two consecutive speeches:

Burn!

First burn, and level Venice to thy ruin.

What, starve like beggars' brats in frosty weather

Under a hedge, and whine ourselves to death!

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Professor Saintsbury, *Short History of English Literature*, p. 501.

and

Revenge! the attribute of gods: they stamped it  
With their great image on our natures!

It is true, on the other hand, that Otway's prose style is far less highly wrought than that of the greater Elizabethans, and that he is often a sloven, and a far from splendid one.

Southerne and Rowe. Thomas Southerne (1660-1746), during his long life, wrote many plays. His comedies have little merit. The best of his tragedies are *The Fatal Marriage* (1694) and *Oronooko, or The Royal Slave* (1696), adapted from Aphra Behn's novel of the same name. Southerne was coupled with Nicholas Rowe by Pope as being 'sure for the passions'. The best scenes of his best plays are effective, though far from great. Like Southerne, Nicholas Rowe (1674-1718) wrote many plays, and, like him, he owes what dramatic fame he possesses to two tragedies, *The Fair Penitent* (1703) and *Jane Shore* (1714). The first is partly adapted from Massinger's *Fatal Dowry*, and is written in glossy pseudo-Fletcherian blank verse, which is as easy to read as it is difficult to remember or to like. Its situations are developed with a certain skill, but are utterly lacking in tragic depth. In this play, as in others, Rowe freely tags his scenes with homilies of this kind:

By such examples are we taught to prove  
The sorrows that attend unlawful love.  
Death, or some worse misfortunes, soon divide  
The injured bridegroom from his guilty bride.  
If you would have the nuptial union last  
Let virtue be the bond that ties it fast.

*Jane Shore* is a much better play. Rowe tells us that it was 'written in imitation of Shakespeare's style', and though the Shakespearean quality is not obvious, the blank verse has gained in freedom and strength, and some of the passages between Jane, her suitor Hastings, and her husband, Shore, alias Dumont, are pathetic and spirited. Both plays enjoyed great popularity throughout the eighteenth century.

Restoration  
Poetry—  
Butler's  
*Hudibras*. The spirit and tendency of Dryden's age may be best illustrated by the fact that of its three greatest poems, two were satires. The *Hudibras* (1663-78) of Samuel Butler (1612-1680) is far more loose in form than *Absalom and Achitophel*, but its looseness, like that of *Don Juan*, is deliberate, and a distinctive literary virtue. It is of great length, and is written in the rhyming octosyllabic couplet, which Butler handles with rollicking ease and vigour. Mock-heroic in form, it describes the manifold adventures of the knight Hudibras and his squire Rollo, in whom, as in their rascalion opponents, Butler satirizes the puritanical foes of royalty. His sneers at their hypocrisy and folly are unceasing, and are enhanced by the imposing classical precedents devised for the deeds of Crowdero the fiddler, Talgol the butcher, and many another undistinguished worthy. The brilliant humour of the poem is



greatly helped, again as in *Don Juan*, by its author's skill and zest in the use of fantastic rhymes. *Hudibras* had a vast popularity, largely due to the eager popular reaction against Puritanism. The best known of Butler's shorter poems is *The Elephant in the Moon*, directed against a member of the Royal Society who had mistaken for an elephant a fly in the lens of a telescope through which he was viewing the moon.

Of far less importance as a satirist is John Oldham (1653-1683), whose fiercely vituperative *Satires upon the Jesuits* are an instructive contrast to the calm and lofty scorn of Dryden. The satirical work of Marvell and Denham has been already noticed. There is much minor satire during the period, and it is interesting to notice that writer after writer published poems entitled *Instructions to a Painter*, after Waller's poem of this title.

Oldham  
and  
others.

Outside satire, a peculiar variety of verse was being developed in the critical poem. This kind, which was to reach its height in Pope's *Essay on Criticism*, has for its chief contemporary examples *An Essay upon Poetry* by John Sheffield, Earl of Mulgrave, and *An Essay on Translated Verse* by Wentworth Dillon, Earl of Roscommon. Though neither production has much value for ourselves, both had great contemporary vogue. Mulgrave's verse was praised by Johnson for its 'correctness', Roscommon's by Pope for its respectability.

Considerably more important is the work of certain lyric poets of the period. John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester (1648-1680), wrote a satirical masterpiece, *A Satire against Mankind*; but he is best known by his songs, the most exquisite of which are perhaps 'Absent from thee I languish still' and 'I cannot change as others do'. The beautiful poem once considered his masterpiece—'Why dost thou shade thy lovely face?'—is now known to be by another hand. A great deal of Rochester's verse is licentious, even beyond the standard of the time. The finest lyric of Sir Charles Sedley (1639-1701) is that beginning,

Rochester  
and Sed-  
ley.

Love still has something of the sea  
From whence his mother rose,

but hardly less perfect in their lighter kind are the two Phyllis poems—'Phyllis is my only joy' and 'Hears not my Phyllis how the birds'. Excellent also is his lyric to Celia, the last lines of which are the complement of Dowson's 'I have been faithful to thee, Cynara, in my fashion':

Why then should I seek further store  
And still make love anew?  
When change itself can give no more  
'Tis easy to be true.

Sedley had been represented as 'Lisideius' in Dryden's *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*; and that dialogue had also presented, under the title 'Eugenius', Charles Sackville, Earl of Dorset (1638-1706), who enjoyed great contemporary fame, both as

satirist and lyricist. For ourselves he lives chiefly by his spirited ballad, or song, 'To all you ladies now on land', said on more than doubtful authority<sup>1</sup> to have been written at sea during the First Dutch War (1665), the night before an engagement. Others who have left one fine lyric or more to posterity are Thomas Flatman, Aphra Behn, and the playwrights Etherege and Otway.

## CHAPTER XIX

### PROSE OF THE RESTORATION

General qualities of Restoration prose—Cowley, Temple, Bunyan, Halifax—Religious writers—Philosophical writers: Locke and others—Diarists: Evelyn, Pepys, and others—Historians.

Restoration  
Prose.

THE trend of prose after the Restoration, as we have seen, was increasingly toward clearness, simplicity, and ease; and here, as elsewhere, Dryden illustrates and heads the new movement. The reasons for the change are many and complicated. The example of France certainly counts for much; and the models she supplied were various. Montaigne, familiar for a full half-century in Florio's translation, strongly affected the prose of Cowley and Dryden and Temple, and, through Cotton's more recent version (1685), in some degree influenced the style of Halifax. The result was a gain in intimacy, simplicity, and ease. But more recent French writers, such as Pascal and La Bruyère, were eagerly read by Dryden and his contemporaries, and the beauty of their style naturally had a strong influence upon men already bent on giving their language classic form. Furthermore, the writings of such critics as Boileau, Le Bossu, Rapin, and Dacier, had greatly quickened the interest of English writers in all matters making for 'correct' expression. It is possible, however, here, as in drama, to exaggerate the foreign influence and neglect the native. The plain style had existed in English from and before the day of Latimer, had been carried on by Hooker, and revived by Clarendon and Hobbes. It had often been practised in conscious reaction against ornate extravagance, and though it had never yet attained the suppleness and ease which might qualify it to become a universal medium, the tendency which it embodies must not be under-rated. A further native factor must be sought in the attempt of the newly-founded Royal Society to evolve and fix a style of writing which should be apt for scientific demonstration. This effort is described in a notable passage of Bishop Sprat's history of the Society<sup>2</sup> (1667). Though all of these influences may

<sup>1</sup> For more about this matter, see 'The Court Poets', by Charles Whibley, *Cambridge History of English Literature*, vol. viii, p. 218.

<sup>2</sup> 'They have therefore been most vigorous in putting in execution the only remedy that can be found for this extravagance, and that has been



be traced in the making of the new prose, it is difficult to disengage any one of them from the general result, or to say that it predominated. A good deal of the literary striving towards order probably had its counterpart in the social forces which were working up toward the Revolution and the refounding of English life on a sounder and stronger basis ; but whatever be its origins, the new tendency is unmistakable, and is seen in the style of many men. The prose writings of Tillotson have been discussed elsewhere. Dryden professed to have used him as a model, but the debt cannot have been a great one.

More important is the prose of Abraham Cowley, which chiefly consists of essays, and bridges the gulf between the old way of writing and the new. The transition may be clearly seen from a comparison of his *Discourse concerning Oliver Cromwell* (1661) with his later essays *Of Solitude* and *Of Greatness*. In the *Discourse* Cowley's periods are often unwieldy : in the essays they have admirable ease and balance. Throughout his later writings there is something of the intimacy and quietism which go to make the charm of Lamb. Cowley.

The prose of Sir William Temple (1628-1699) received the highest praise from Swift and Johnson, and was undoubtedly regarded as a model by the eighteenth century. To our own age it seems to achieve greatness only at moments, and for the rest, to be polished and agreeable. His works consist of essays (*Miscellanea*, 1680-1701), memoirs, and of the letters published after his death by Swift, who had at one time lived with him at Moor Park as his secretary. The letters are interesting, not only for their personal charm, but for the light they throw on contemporary politics and diplomacy. The essays deal with a multitude of subjects, including political science, literary criticism, gout, and gardening. The best known, though not the most charming, are those *Upon Ancient and Modern Learning* (1690) and *Upon Poetry*. Temple.

All the writers just mentioned ensued simplicity ; but their simplicity was the result of much craft and striving. John Bunyan was simple after another fashion. ' I could ', he says, ' have stepped into a style much higher than this in which I have here discoursed, and could have adorned all things more than here I have seemed to do : but I dare not. God did not play in tempting of me ; neither did I play when I sunk as into a bottomless pit, when the pangs of hell caught hold upon me ; wherefore I may not play in relating of them, Bunyan.

a constant resolution to reject all amplification, digressions, and swellings of style ; to return back to the primitive purity and shortness, when men delivered so many things almost in an equal number of words. They have exacted from all their members a close naked natural way of speaking, positive expressions, clear senses, a native easiness, bringing all things as near the mathematical plainness as they can, and preferring the language of artizans, countrymen, and merchants before that of poets or scholars.'

but be plain and simple, and lay down the thing as it was. He that liketh it, let him receive it: and he that doth not, let him produce a better.' In his boyhood, as the apprentice of his father, the brazier, he had little leisure or taste for general study. Later, all chance of this was cut short by the Civil War, in which he took up arms. Yet one Book was always with him, and moulded his style as surely as his character. 'He had lived in the Bible', says J. R. Green, 'till its words became his own.' He had published two theological treatises before the Restoration, but the inspiration of his soul was not fully liberated till the imprisonment of his body in Bedford Jail (1660). While in prison he wrote several works, and among them *Grace Abounding* (published in 1666), one of the four great books on which his fame depends, and one of the greatest self-confessional pieces ever written. It describes his sins and manifold temptations by the devil in the days when he was 'more loathsome in his own eyes than was a toad': and tells of his conversion, his terrible relapses into darkness and despair, and his final salvation and illumination by God. The book is written throughout in intense and moving language, and its spirit is expressed in these words of the preface to his children: 'If you have sinned against light: if you are tempted to blaspheme: if you are drowned in despair: if you think God fights against you; or if heaven is hid from your eyes—remember it was thus with your father, but out of them all the Lord delivered me.'

*The Holy War.*

The three chief remaining works of Bunyan are *The Pilgrim's Progress* (first published in 1678), the *Life and Death of Mr. Badman* (1680), and *The Holy War* (1682). *The Holy War* is an allegory describing the siege laid by the devil to the human soul, which is represented by the city of Mansoul, open to attack through five gates—Eargate, Eyegate, Mouthgate, Nosegate, and Feelgate. The chief virtues and vices appear under symbolic names, such as Captain Boanerges, Captain Resistance, Captain Foresight, Mr. Incredulity, Mr. Stand-to-lies, Mr. Falsepeace. The town is taken by Diabolus, but is relieved by the armies of God (Shaddai), and stern justice is meted out to the Vices. A fresh war breaks out between Emmanuel and Diabolus, and the issue is left undecided. *The Holy War* contains some of Bunyan's most spirited prose, and abounds in vivid and telling incident. Yet it is hard to agree with Macaulay that but for *The Pilgrim's Progress* it would have been the greatest allegory in the language. It lacks the simplicity and unity of design which distinguish the greater work; and the story and its symbolism are alike confused by the swarming multitude of allegorical figures.

*The Pilgrim's Progress*

Had these flaws been present in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, it could never have been as eagerly read as it has been by Englishmen ever since the day of its publication. Only one Book has had a greater hold on them; and the spell in each case has been due to the union of spiritual sublimity with



superb descriptive power. The great allegory is too familiar to be described here: Christian and Christiana, Greatheart and Valiant and Feeble, the Hill Difficulty and the Valley of Humiliation, are part of our knowledge for ever. The inner meaning of the allegory, the progress of the human soul through dangers and temptations to salvation, is simple and of universal appeal. Suggestions for the story may have been found in previous works—notably in Deguileville's *Pilgrimage of the Soul*, less probably in *The Faerie Queene*. Yet in all essentials of form and spirit *The Pilgrim's Progress* is original: as Bunyan himself tells us, 'manner and matter was all mine own—the whole and every whit is mine.' He further testifies that it was written for himself, not for his neighbour—'I did it mine own self to gratify'. To this fact is mainly due the strength and simplicity which are its supreme greatness.

Despite its high allegorical meaning, *The Pilgrim's Progress* has many attributes of the novel. *The Life and Death of Mr. Badman* has still more, though in form it is an allegorical dialogue. It shows a man beginning in the state of sin described by Bunyan in *Grace Abounding*, but experiencing no genuine conversion, and going on from depth to depth of evil. Badman is atheist, drunkard, thief, swindler, and hypocrite: yet he is not a faggot of abstractions, but a very human scoundrel, drawn in the setting of Bunyan's time, with a vivid and Defoe-like realism. This realism is not confined to descriptive strokes but extends to the whole conception of the work. Thus Bunyan will neither save Badman by an eleventh-hour repentance, nor bring him to an end of Faust-like horror: he first leads him through a period of slow married misery, and then leaves him on his death-bed, tranquil, unregenerate, and predestined to damnation. In any history of the English novel *Mr. Badman* must hold high place. It contains some of Bunyan's most masterly prose.

George Savile, Marquis of Halifax (1633–1695), moves in a different world of thought and feeling from Bunyan, and writes with far more conscious art. He must certainly be ranked high among the makers of the new prose. His style is lucid, flexible, and rounded. It freely admits the epigram of which he was a master, is admirable for exposition, and can at need kindle into fine eloquence. His most famous thing is *The Character of a Trimmer*, a pamphlet in which he states his political faith, and refutes 'that most singular apophthegm, a trimmer is worse than a rebel'. In general, the style of this work is epigrammatic and hard-held; but Halifax gives his eloquence free rein in the great passage on Truth, which suggests the influence both of Montaigne and of the *Areopagitica*. There are also two splendid passages in praise of England and her king. Other political tracts of Halifax are *The Anatomy of an Equivalent*, *A Letter to a Dissenter*, and *Some Cautions for the Choice of Members in Parliament*. In

Mr. Badman.

Halifax.

these Halifax's magnificent sagacity is lightened by his grace of style and brilliant use of irony. His *Advice to a Daughter*, addressed to his own daughter, the future mother of the great Lord Chesterfield, contains much that is affectionate and charming, but also many satirical strokes which suggest the earlier character writers and anticipate Swift. Thus of the vain woman of fashion he writes that, on hearing other women praised, 'up she riseth and goeth home, half burst with anger and straitlacing'; and again, 'she is faithful to the fashion, to which not only her opinion but her senses are resigned: so obsequious she is to it that she would be ready to be resigned even to virtue with all its faults, if she had her dancing master's word that it was practised at court.'

More, Cudworth and others. Among the leading religious and philosophical writers of the period may be named the Cambridge Platonists, Henry More (1614-1687) and Ralph Cudworth (1617-1688). More's poetry has received separate mention: in prose he has left several theological and metaphysical treatises. The chief work of Cudworth is *The True Intellectual System of the Universe*, which ranks among the very finest of English philosophical works, and is written in an admirably clear and forcible style. John Wilkins (1614-1672), Bishop of Chester, wrote on science and religion; in *Ecclesiastes, or The Gift of Preaching*, he enjoins a plain pulpit style. Much of his own writing was whimsical, and he has an acceptable gift of humour. His chief remaining works are *The Discovery of a New World*, and his *Essay towards a Philosophical Language*.

The *Sacra Telluris Theoria* of Thomas Burnet (1635-1715) is a curious combination of theology, popular science, and romance, and is not without qualities of style. Joseph Glanvill (1636-1680), a Fellow of the Royal Society, wrote several scientific works, chief among which are *Plus Ultra* and *Scepsis Scientifica*; but his most famous work is *Sadducismus Triumphatus* (1681), which Lecky has called the ablest defence of the belief in witchcraft ever published. Glanvill's style, which is modelled on Sir Thomas Browne's, shows that the prevailing tendency towards plainness in prose had not proved fatal to the more ornate and imaginative fashion of writing.

Locke. A quite different outlook and style are evident in the writings of John Locke (1632-1704), the leading philosopher of his age. Locke's writings possess little appeal or illumination for those who have been swayed by the older transcendentalism of Plato, or the newer transcendentalism of Kant, Hegel, Fichte, and their followers: yet, were this a short history of philosophy, a detailed survey would be given of his famous *Essay concerning Human Understanding* (1690), his *Two Treatises of Government* (1690), and his numerous remaining works on philosophy, sociology, and economics. Literature, however, is not directly concerned with his arguments against innate ideas, his general theory of knowledge, or his conception of the social contract. It is sufficient to say that his style is clear,



precise, and as forcible as a style may be which utterly lacks inspiration.

Highly notable among the prose writers of the period was the class of diarists and writers of memoirs and essays. Only brief mention can be made here of Sir John Reresby, who left memoirs of English life and continental travel; Sir Richard Bulstrode, whose letters throw a certain light on foreign politics, and whose memoirs vindicate the characters of Charles I and Charles II; Lady Warwick, whose *Diary* displays her fine Puritanism; Lady Fanshawe, whose brave and romantic personality is disclosed in her delightful *Memoirs*; and Roger North, who has left quaint and readable lives of himself and his three distinguished brothers. Two names stand out from the rest—those of John Evelyn (1620–1706) and Samuel Pepys (1633–1703). These men were friends, and Fellows of the Royal Society; but in temperament and literary style they are poles apart.

Diarists.

Apart from his famous *Diary*, Evelyn has left many original works and translations. He was always a lover of gardens, and his treatise *Sylva* had a great effect upon English arboriculture. His *Life of Mrs. Godolphin* (Margaret Blagge) is by far his most attractive work, and describes the friendship which he for many years enjoyed with one of the most beautiful, virtuous, and charming women of his age. More generally read, however, is his famous *Diary*, which is a fairly complete record of his long life, and describes his Oxford education, his extensive travels in Europe, his experiences of the Commonwealth, and of public life after the Restoration, and the long and happy retirement at Sayes Court which formed the last chapter of his life. The *Diary* clearly displays the fineness of Evelyn's character and taste, and his great love of art and general culture. Few men of his period had more attractive private virtues; but it must be admitted that the charm of his personality is imperfectly reflected in his prose style, which lacks distinction and colour, and loses greatly by contrast with the racy and individual periods of Samuel Pepys.

Evelyn.

Pepys's *Diary* is unique in the English, and perhaps in any, language. It was originally written in a complicated system of shorthand, which was not deciphered till the year 1822, when John Smith completed his translation of it. It covers the period between January 1, 1660, when Pepys was a poor clerk in private employ, and May 31, 1669, when he gave up keeping the diary owing to his fear of blindness. During these years, besides acquiring a considerable fortune, he became Clerk of the Privy Seal and Clerk of the Acts. Eventually he was made Secretary of the Admiralty, in which position he did work of permanent national value. It would hardly be an exaggeration to call him the father of the modern English Navy. The *Diary* contains much interesting comment on naval matters, which he was eventually to amplify in his *Memoirs of the Navy* (1690). Interesting, too, are his descrip-

Pepys.

tions of the Plague, the Great Fire, the sea-wars with Holland, and his portraits of such contemporaries as Rupert of the Rhine, Blake, and his patrons the Duke of York, the Earl of Sandwich, and Sir William Coventry; but by far the most readable part of the *Diary* is that in which he tells of his own household affairs, his merry jaunts to the play-house, his peccadilloes, short-lived reformations, and much enjoyed relapses; his quarrels with his fellow officials, his eagerness for wealth, his simple delight in rich clothes, the not less simple egoism of his domestic relations; his delight in music, his unsteady sense of literary and dramatic values, and his steady and unwavering sense of his own value and his own pleasure. The extreme frankness of Pepys finds expression in some strokes which it has not been found possible to print, even in Mr. Wheatley's very full and faithful edition; but it manifests itself more harmlessly in such touches as these, which help to give the *Diary* its salt: 'My wife having dressed herself in a silly dress of a blue petticoat uppermost, and a white satin waistcoat and white hood, though I think she did it because her gown is gone to the tailor's, did, together with my being hungry, which always makes me peevish, makes me angry.' . . . 'But Lord! how did I please myself to make Betty Turner sing, to see what a beast she is as to singing, not knowing how to sing one note in tune; but only for the experiment I would not for 40s. hear her sing a tune: worse than my wife a thousand times, so that it do a little reconcile me to her.' . . . 'Called upon Doll, our pretty 'Change woman, for a pair of gloves trimmed with yellow ribbon to match the petticoat my wife bought yesterday, which cost me 20s.; but she is so pretty that, God forgive me, I could not think it too much, which is a strange slavery that I stand in to beauty, that I value nothing near it.'

Historians.

The age was by no means a strong one in history. The chief name here is that of Gilbert Burnet (1643-1715), best known by his posthumously published *History of My Own Time* (published 1724-1734), but notable also for his *History of the English Reformation* (1679), and for several other works. Burnet has been called a 'Whig Clarendon': his historical method has recently received praise; but his literary gift is not great, though Swift certainly went too far when he said of the *History*, 'I never read so ill a style'. Burnet's pupil, Andrew Fletcher of Saltoun (1655-1716), wrote several political treatises, though he is best known as having preserved the saying of a 'very wise man' that 'if a man were permitted to make all the ballads, he need not care who should make the laws of a nation'. George Mackenzie, Earl of Cromarty (1630-1714), lives through his account of the Gowrie conspiracy, and his *Vindication of the Reformation of the Church of Scotland*. The period was apparently favourable to anti-Quarian research. In 1656 the learned Dugdale published his *Antiquities of Warwickshire*, and in 1691-2 appeared a still



more valuable work, the *Athenae Oxonienses* of Anthony Wood, a description of the chief writers produced by Oxford University. The famous *Miscellanies* (1696) of John Aubrey (1626-1697) contain much agreeable gossip.

## CHAPTER XX

### THE RISE OF THE PRESS

Defoe, Addison, Steele, Swift, Bolingbroke, Shaftesbury, Berkeley, Joseph Butler, Bentley, and others.

It has been shown that throughout the Age of Dryden English prose was constantly gaining in flexibility and freedom. This process had been greatly assisted by the birth and sudden growth of the English press. The first English newspapers date from 1622, when news sheets known as *Corantos* began to be issued at intervals of a few days. They dealt exclusively with foreign news—thus the organ of their leading promoter, Nathaniel Butter, is styled *Weekly News from Italy and Germany*. Ben Jonson, in his comedy, *The Staple of News*, satirizes racily the unscrupulousness of their editors and the childish curiosity of their readers. The publication of the *Corantos* was greatly hindered by the Star Chamber, which at one time succeeded in suppressing them altogether for a period of six years. In 1641 the Star Chamber was abolished and the press for a time became free. The *Coranto* disappeared, and its place was taken by a new kind of periodical, the *Diurnall*, which supplied domestic news and in many cases endeavoured to influence the political opinion of its readers. During the Civil War the new press was freely used for controversy on both sides, and a series of polemical newspapers, known as *Mercuries*, sprang into being. The Presbyterian tailor, John Dillingham, created the leading article. For the royalists, Sir John Berkenhead edited the *Mercurius Aulicus* from Oxford: on the parliamentary side the chief journalists were Cromwell's red-headed leader-writer, Henry Walker, and that scoundrelly scribbler befriended by Milton, Marchamont Nedham. Parliament was greatly inconvenienced by the scurrility and party venom shown in many of these publications, and in 1647 it prohibited the publication of any book or sheet of news 'except the same be licensed by both or either House of Parliament'.

The Beginnings of English Journalism.

The most famous of the journalists empowered to write under this ordinance was Henry Muddiman, editor, before the Restoration, of *The Parliamentary Intelligencer*, and, after it, of *The London Gazette*. Muddiman organized the distribution of reliable news with a thoroughness hitherto unknown in England. For a few years he was the only authorized journalist in the country. In 1663, however, the Government mono-

Muddiman, L'Estrange and others.

polized the right to publish news, and gave the sole control of it to Roger L'Estrange (1616-1704), a keen royalist partisan, who became editor of *The Public Intelligencer*. Muddiman eventually regained the ascendancy in journalism, but L'Estrange was a busy writer throughout his long life, and published several translations and innumerable pamphlets. In 1681 he started an important political newspaper, *The Observer*. In 1682 the Licensing Act lapsed, and the party press became exceedingly active, though the Government still controlled its own *Gazette* through an official Gazetteer. Descriptive journalism at this period is represented by the *Amusements Serious and Comical* of Thomas Brown (1663-1704), which supply a curious and vivid picture of contemporary London life. The more reflective reader found his account in the *Athenian Gazette*, afterwards the *Athenian Mercury*, of John Dunton (1659-1733), who is also notable for that strange volume, his *Life and Errors*. But for some years before the appearance of the first daily, *The Daily Courant*, in 1702, journalism had been chiefly active along party lines. Roper's *Post Boy* was edited in the Tory interest; another Tory editor was Mist—according to Pope, as 'dear to Dulness' as was Ridpath, editor of the Whig *Flying Post*. In the Second Book of the *Dunciad* Pope in literal fact pillories Ridpath and Roper, together with John Tutchin, editor of *The Observer*, and one greater still:

Earless on high stood unabash'd Defoe,  
And Tutchin flagrant from the scourge below,  
And Ridpath, Roper, cudgelled might ye view,  
The very worsted still looked black and blue.

Defoe—  
His Jour-  
nalism.

Daniel Defoe (1661-1731), who is famous to our age for his novels, was notorious to his own for his pamphlets and journalism. Into the intricate and, for the most part, discreditable details of his life it is impossible here to pry, though they have the closest bearing upon his controversial writings. He was a mercenary and unscrupulous pamphleteer, who ran indifferently with the Tory hare or the Whig hounds. His vigorous but prosaic verse satire, *The True-born Englishman* (1701), satirizes the attempt of Tutchin to decry King William for his foreign origin. The purpose of his most famous pamphlet, *The Shortest Way with the Dissenters* (1702), remains something of a mystery to this day. In so far as it possessed a practical aim at all, and was not a mere literary exercise, it was probably intended to discredit the High Church Party by outgoing them in venom against dissent. But neither dissenters nor churchmen received it favourably, and it brought upon Defoe the punishment indicated in Pope's lines—though the word 'earless' is a libel. This experience drew forth from its victim his forcible *Hymn to the Pillory* (1703). His sentence had also included imprisonment in Newgate during the queen's pleasure. Shortly after his



release he began to edit the first and most powerful of his journals, *The Review* (1704), an organ written in the interests of Harley, and containing much information regarding foreign affairs. Later he edited a trade journal, *Mercator*, and helped to edit the Tory *Mist's Journal*, secretly wresting its point of view to the Whig interest.

Much other journalism and pamphleteering may be placed to his credit—or discredit; but far greater importance attaches to the remarkable works of fiction which begin in 1719 with *Robinson Crusoe*, and comprise *Duncan Campbell*, *The Memoirs of a Cavalier*, and *Captain Singleton* (all 1720), *Moll Flanders*, *The Religious Courtship*, *The History of the Plague*, and *Colonel Jacque* (all 1722), *Roxana* (1724), and *A New Voyage Round the World* (1725). In these novels Defoe put to brilliant use the experience which he had gained in the rough-and-tumble of journalism. All of them were written strictly with an eye to what the public wanted, and Defoe had found this to be first and foremost what was lifelike and lively. Sometimes, as in his greatest work, *Robinson Crusoe*, he gave it a narrative of actual life, thinly disguised and greatly elaborated. Elsewhere, as in *Duncan Campbell*, there was elaboration without disguise. *Roxana* and *Moll Flanders* are pure invention: yet each of them has the detail and colour of reality. Defoe's keen utilitarian imagination showed him exactly what veins of popular curiosity might be worked with profit. The scorn of fashionable critics could not stale his infinite variety: sometimes it was a shipwreck he gave the public, sometimes a piracy, or a tale of ghosts, or vagabondage, or prostitution. If he was an artist in pot-boiling, he was also a great master of the infinitely little. Much of his genius consists in the rightness and precision which he imparts to his description of detail, and in the resulting sense of security felt by his reader. A good deal of his narrative consists of adventure or intrigue or roguery—in all of which effects he was helped by his life-long experience. But, intriguer and adventurer as he was, he had still a certain spiritual insight, and, as in *Robinson Crusoe*, could deal at least plausibly with ethical issues. His fiction is nearly always alive and readable; and he did the English novel good service at a stage when it was still uncouth and unformed.

Defoe, especially in *The Review*, had done much toward bringing journalism into touch with literature: the process was completed by Richard Steele (1672–1729) and Joseph Addison (1672–1719). The outlook and work of both men were strongly affected by the social forces of their time, of which they became the conscious, and sometimes very self-conscious, interpreters. The Restoration had resulted in a licentious and cynical reaction against the rigid Puritanism which for twenty years had gripped and held the English nation. The Puritans, while doing much to purify and ennoble life, had also done much to cramp and deaden it, and their attitude toward art

His  
Novels.

Addison  
and  
Steele.

is evidenced by their prohibition of stage performances during a period of eighteen years. The most obvious symbol of the revulsion against them is the court of Charles II with its profligacy and wit and cynicism. In literature, the same reaction inspires the anti-puritanical satire of Butler and the unabashed and shameless dialogue of Restoration comedy. Puritanism, however, had bitten too deeply into the national life to be disposed of by a parcel of courtiers and libertines. It had always had its stronghold among the middle class, and this, during and after the Commonwealth, had been steadily growing in weight and dignity. The ever-widening opportunities of commerce had given it material prosperity, and with this had come fresh needs and tastes, which it often strove to satisfy in ways quite other than material. The religion of which it had become the chief guardian was now gradually broadened and humanized by a new culture: hence an order which had discarded the harshness of the old Puritanism, yet retained its strong moral fervour, and set itself against the fashionable immorality of the time. The new tendency was both intensified and broadened by the appearance of the coffee-houses, which gave thinking members of the middle class a hitherto unknown opportunity of meeting and exchanging their views on literature and life. Hence a quiet and steady reaction in favour of order and decency—a reaction furthered and justified by its freedom from fanaticism. It was this spirit which provided Steele and Addison with the opportunity employed by them to such notable purpose in *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*.

Steele's  
Early  
Writings.

Before their collaboration in journalism, each had written considerably in other kinds. While still a captain in the Fusiliers, Steele had published *The Christian Hero* (1701), a book of devotion which combines his characteristic moral fervour with a no less characteristic frankness regarding his own very definite and human failings. During the next five years he wrote three plays—*The Funeral* (1701), *The Lying Lover* (1703), and *The Tender Husband* (1705), which illustrate strikingly the change that had come over English drama since the licentious heyday of Restoration comedy. The reaction had found its most formidable expression in Jeremy Collier's *Short View of the Immorality and Profanity of the English Stage*, and is clearly evident in *The Funeral*. Though Steele, as he tells us, wrote this comedy in order to 'enliven his character', after having been 'slighted instead of encouraged for his declaration as to religion', he was prevented, both by his own instincts and by the increasing decorum of his age, from taking the free fling of Etherege or Congreve, and he feels at least compelled to make 'virtue and vice appear just as they ought to do'. The play describes in a series of amusing, if somewhat forced, situations the stratagem by which an elderly nobleman, Lord Brumpton, feigns death in order to test the affection of his young wife. *The Lying Lover* is an



adaptation of Corneille's *Le Menteur*; for all its brilliant strokes it is handicapped by its author's subservience to Collier's injunctions. It tends to justify Hazlitt's remark that Steele's comedies were 'moral homilies', and Steele himself tells us that on its appearance it was 'damned for its piety'. *The Tender Husband* is less didactic; it contains some exceedingly unnatural situations, but also some admirably drawn characters, including Sir Harry Gubbin, his yokelish son Humphry, who anticipates and partly occasions Tony Lumpkin, and the romantic Bidy Tipkin, an earlier Lydia Languish. Interwoven with Steele's comic effects in all these plays is a sentimentalism which is in part temperamental, in part due to his imperfect mastery of dramatic motive and material.

Steele's friendship with Addison dates from their school days at Charterhouse: later, they were at Oxford together, though at different colleges. Addison went there two years before Steele, and remained as a Fellow of Magdalen, while his friend was pushing his fortunes in the world. This long period of learning and leisure gave mellowness to his character, while his practice of Latin composition helped him to his mastery of English style. His early efforts include poems in both Latin and English. After leaving Oxford he travelled for four years on the Continent, owing to the not wholly disinterested beneficence of the Whig Ministers of State. While abroad he wrote the first four acts of *Cato*, and after his return he published his *Remarks on Italy*. But his first work of real importance was *The Campaign* (1704), a poem in heroic couplets written at the request of Halifax and Godolphin, in celebration of Marlborough and Blenheim. As a whole it is conventional, and has been described by Warton as 'a gazette in rhyme'; but it has a certain dignity, and there is power in the description of Marlborough's generalship in the battle and in the comparison of him to the angel who

Addison's  
Early  
Writings.

pleased the Almighty's orders to perform,  
Rides in the whirlwind, and directs the storm.

The chief remaining work of Addison's earlier manhood was an unsuccessful opera named *Rosamond* (1706).

Neither writer reached his full strength till the period of *The Tatler*, which first appeared on April 12, 1709, and was published tri-weekly till January 2, 1711. Steele was now, as generally, in financial straits, and saw a chance of using profitably the knowledge and experience he had gained as Government Gazetteer. This was the material cause of the paper's existence. The final cause was the instruction and edification of thoughtful men and women. Edification, as has been shown, had always been congenial to Steele. His official appointments had given him an inner knowledge of public affairs, domestic and foreign: to this he added the wide acquaintance with human nature which, like Addison, he had

*The  
Tatler.*

gained in the coffee-houses. Addison began to write for the paper after the first few weeks of its existence, and supplemented Steele's experience with the fruits of his scholarship and travel. The objects of the magazine, and their close connexion with the coffee-houses, are indicated by Steele in his introductory advertisement: 'All accounts of gallantry, pleasure, and entertainment, shall be under the article of White's Chocolate House; poetry under that of Wills' Coffee-House; foreign and domestic news, you will have from St. James' Coffee-House: and what else I shall on any other subject offer shall be dated from my own apartment.' For added picturesqueness, Steele published the paper under the fictitious name and personality of Isaac Bickerstaff, a pseudonym invented by Swift, and used by him in the perpetration of his famous hoax on Partridge, the almanac-maker. At first *The Tatler* kept fairly closely to its professed objects, and its accounts of the drama, politics, and fashion are full of the detail and colour of the age. Throughout them Steele keeps to his intention of rallying 'all those singularities of human life, through the different professions and characters in it which obstruct anything that was truly good and great'. The rallying was often done with humour, sometimes more gravely, and occasionally, as in his onslaughts on duelling and gaming, with a fervour which makes it no longer rallying at all. In *The Tatler*, Steele also developed the character-sketch, as in his admirable picture of Jenny Distaff and her husband, Tranquillus. His description of his own father's death is written with moving pathos. Yet Steele's contributions to *The Tatler* were often hastily written, and they lack the grace and polish which from the beginning distinguished the articles of Addison. 'The elegance, purity, and correctness which appeared in his (Addison's) style, were not so much to my purpose,' he writes. Many of Addison's contributions consist of that delicately satirical portraiture which he continued in *The Spectator*, often failing to better the brilliancy of his earlier efforts. It was probably also largely owing to Addison that *The Tatler* gradually discarded the provision of news, and depended more and more on the free, yet carefully finished, occasional essay. The share of each writer is accurately indicated by Professor Courthope: 'Though it was doubtless Addison's fine workmanship and admirable method which carried to perfection the style of writing initiated in *The Tatler*, yet there is scarcely a department of essay writing developed in *The Spectator* which does not owe its origin to Steele.'

The reasons for *The Tatler's* discontinuance are complex and somewhat obscure. In certain of its later numbers Steele had attacked Harley, yet on the succession of the Toriês to office had received his help and protection. In these circumstances he seems to have thought it inadvisable to continue a publication with such a political past; but there



was a more essential reason for his decision. Both his experience and Addison's had shown them that their main strength and opportunity lay rather in the essay than in the newsletter; and they now projected a publication which should disregard almost entirely the reporting of fact, and should confine itself to the criticism, grave and gay, of life and conduct. The result was the *Spectator*, which made its first appearance on March 1, 1711, and continued to appear daily till December 6, 1712, supplying one essay only as the content of each issue. All but a very few of the papers were written by Steele and Addison: the rest came from Hughes, Tickell, and Addison's cousin, Eustace Budgell. *The Spectator* took for its theme the doings of men, their thoughts, books, fashions, loves, and humours. Much of it was written in the satirical moralizing vein which both writers had already perfected and made popular. The great success of Bickerstaff led to the conception of the 'Spectator' as a personage whose comment and criticism might give unity to the miscellany; and fresh figures were added, representing contemporary interests and opinions. Chief among these was the old, chivalrous, and lovable Sir Roger de Coverley, a splendid survival of the cavalier and feudal ideal. Sir Andrew Freeport is a merchant, hard-headed, prosperous, and, to many, somewhat uninteresting. The Army is represented by Captain Sentry, the world of letters and criticism by the Templar: there is also a clergyman. A figure characteristic of the time is Will Honeycomb, a younger son growing old, yet unwearied in fashionable trifling. This set forms a club in itself, and includes representatives of the chief existing coffee-houses. Through these personalities, Steele and Addison were enabled to interpret and criticize their age, while supplying the human interest of the novel and the character-sketch. Their masterpiece is undoubtedly the noble and touching figure of Sir Roger. To him both authors contributed their finest strokes: if his death-scene is Addison's, the most memorable portrayal of his love-affair is Steele's. In the Coverley papers, as in the remaining *Spectators*, the qualities of the two writers remain distinct and complementary. The fervour which often transfigures Steele's morality is set off by Addison's measured and ironical reflection.

The contrast may be made by setting Steele's papers on education,<sup>1</sup> jealousy,<sup>2</sup> and scandal<sup>3</sup> beside Addison's on religious enthusiasm and excess,<sup>4</sup> manners,<sup>5</sup> and bores.<sup>6</sup> Steele's serious *Spectators* are saved from tediousness by their ethical intensity. Addison's, though sincere, are lit with no such fervour, and when his irony fails, they frequently become tedious.<sup>7</sup> Many of the essays treat of women, and endeavour to raise their status from the depth to which it had been reduced by the cynical libertinism of the Restoration. This

<sup>1</sup> *Spectator*, No. 230.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* 194.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* 348.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* 201.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* 119.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* 371.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 441, 501.

The  
*Spectator*.

aim is especially marked in Steele, who declares his ambition 'to make the word wife the most agreeable and delightful name in Nature',<sup>1</sup> endorses the claim of sensible women to be addressed sensibly by men,<sup>2</sup> enlarges on the joys of happy,<sup>3</sup> and the miseries of utilitarian,<sup>4</sup> marriages, and admonishes women for their good in his remarks on the 'henpeckt', and the duel of sex.<sup>5</sup> Addison's best contributions on this theme are generally in lighter vein, as in his papers on suffragettes,<sup>6</sup> and hooped skirts:<sup>7</sup> when he tries to improve the occasion he is frequently ineffective. His wide reading and fine sense of literature are displayed in many papers: thus he formulates theories of tragedy,<sup>8</sup> genius, and art,<sup>9</sup> declares his love of old ballads,<sup>10</sup> appraises Pope's *Essay on Criticism*,<sup>11</sup> writes with discrimination on Homer and Virgil, and interprets Milton in a series of essays all the more remarkable in view of the imperfect contemporary sense of his genius. Those modern readers who find no great attraction in the more serious *Spectators*, will surely find their account in the lighter ones—in Steele's racy rallying of those who are 'extremely learned and knotty' in expounding the obvious:<sup>12</sup> in his whimsical letter from the Emperor of China to the Pope<sup>13</sup>; in his rollicking description of the 'infirmary for those who should be out of humour'<sup>14</sup>; or they may take joy in Addison's inimitable description of the Spectator's dialogue with the stage-lion in *Hydaspes*<sup>15</sup>; in his account of that formidable dramatic critic, 'the trunkmaker of the upper gallery'<sup>16</sup>; or of the Widows' Club,<sup>17</sup> or of the French 'Academy for Politics'.<sup>18</sup> If Steele be allowed—as he surely must be allowed—greater originality and natural force, Addison was incontestably the finer artist. Lacking the intensity and great sweep of Dryden, he handled English prose with unparalleled ease and finish, and showed its writers a new perfection. Hardly less precious was the infinite variety which he and Steele imparted to the essay, and the wide possibilities which they opened up for their followers. *The Spectator* often deals in material not usually handled by the essayist, and contains many elements of the novel and the short story.

After its cessation Steele published another daily, *The Guardian*, and for a few numbers enjoyed Addison's co-operation. But over and above its purely literary features, the paper dealt in politics, which soon proved its undoing. Steele's subsequent connexion with *The Englishman*, and other papers, is almost entirely political, and need not here concern us. In 1722 he wrote and produced his last play, *The Conscious Lovers*, a well-made but artificial and over-serious comedy. Addison, too, in his last years wrote a comedy entitled *The*

<sup>1</sup> *Spectator*, No. 490.<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* 534.<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* 479.<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* 522.<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* 176.<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* 81.<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* 127.<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* 237.<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* 160.<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* 70, 74, 85.<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* 253.<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* 138.<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* 545.<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* 429.<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* 12.<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* 235.<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* 561.<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* 305.



*Drummer*, which contains some brilliant dialogue but is otherwise inferior. More famous in its day, but not more satisfying to posterity, is *Cato*, a dignified and frozen tragedy in blank verse. Had Addison and Steele not handled the essay, their names would not be familiar, as they are, to all Englishmen.

Jonathan Swift (1667–1745) is the greatest and most terrible prose satirist in our language, though his sponsor in letters was the urbane Sir William Temple. During his stay at Moor Park as Temple's secretary he wrote two of his most famous works, *A Tale of a Tub* (1696) and *The Battle of the Books* (1697). Primarily, the *Tale* is a satire on Roman Catholicism, Presbyterianism, and, in a lesser degree, on Anglicanism; but in its numerous digressions, Swift's satire plays acridly and freely over life and letters. The *Battle of the Books* was written in support of Temple and against Bentley, who had respectively championed the Ancients and the Moderns in a famous controversy of the day. Swift handled Bentley, and his ally Wotton, with savage scorn, and pointed his moral by comparing the Moderns to a spider spinning dirt, poison, and pedantry out of its own entrails, and the Ancients to a bee going to the flowers and blossoms of Nature, thence filling its hive 'with honey and wax, and thus furnishing mankind with the two noblest of things, which are sweetness and light'. The *Tale of a Tub*, though not directed against religion, had been far from orthodox; but orthodoxy's claims were fully honoured in the satirical and brilliantly-named *Argument to Prove that the abolishing of Christianity may, as things now stand, be attended with some inconveniences, and perhaps not produce those many good effects proposed thereby* (1708).

Swift—  
Early  
Writings

In 1701 Swift had written the first of his political pamphlets, the *Discourse on the Dissensions in Athens and Rome*, which remonstrated against the impeachment of Somers and his Whig colleagues, and at once brought its author their goodwill and favour. Swift was still a Whig when, in 1708, he wrote *The Sentiments of a Church of England Man*; but in 1710 he quarrelled with the Party concerning certain Church matters, and passed over to the Tories. Their leaders, Harley and St. John, now showed him favour and friendship, and, in return, he rendered them invaluable aid through the articles which he contributed to their organ, *The Examiner*. In 1711 he published one of his ablest political pamphlets, *The Conduct of the Allies*, directed against the continuance of the war with France and the corruption of the Whig Junto. To the same class and period belong a series of other pamphlets, including *The Importance of the 'Guardian' Considered* and *The Public Spirit of the Whigs*—both directed expressly at Steele and his paper—and *Free Thoughts upon the Present State of Affairs*. Of less importance is his strongly partisan *History of the Last Four Years of Queen Anne*. To a different phase and period belong the celebrated *Drapier's Letters* (1724), in which he took up the cudgels for Ireland—or rather for the English in

Ireland—in consequence of a monopoly enabling a certain William Wood to coin copper halfpence, and thus exploit the country for the benefit of himself and the king's mistress. These pamphlets do not represent the highest flights of Swift's genius, but they are powerful and straightforward, and produced a remarkable effect at their time. A terrible and passionate piece of satire is the *Modest Proposal for Preventing the Children of Poor People in Ireland from being a Burden to their Parents or Country* (1729). Here Swift outlines with minute realism a plan for using the starving children for food, and thus turning them to use while putting them out of their misery.

*Gulliver's  
Travels.*

Like the two works just mentioned, Swift's greatest book, *Gulliver's Travels*, was written in Ireland: he published it in England in 1726. Its first two parts, the Voyages to Lilliput and Brobdingnag, are known and loved by every school-child for their ingenious marvels, yet remain for the initiated masterpieces of satire. Beneath their whimsical surface glows Swift's fiery scorn for the politicians, theologians, and militarists of England, and, ultimately, for mankind in general. The midgets symbolize the pettiness, the giants the grossness, of human kind. Yet Swift does not stickle for allegorical consistency if he sees a chance of making a point against his race. Thus the King of Brobdingnag is no longer cynosure but critic when he comments on Gulliver's account of human progress and civilization: 'the bulk of your natives appear to me to be the most pernicious race of odious little vermin that Nature ever suffered to crawl on the face of the earth.' The savagery of the attack, and the fierce exultant coarseness with which it is delivered, wax throughout the Voyage to Laputa, till they reach their ghastly culmination in the contrast drawn between those wise and gentle horses, the Houyhnhnms, and their subjects, the unspeakable human-like Yahoos. The Laputans, who conduct imbecile and often disgusting experiments in an Academy on a floating island, represent the scientific pedants who had always met with Swift's contempt. The Yahoos are the most appalling embodiment of his scorn for man, and there is something almost Satanic in the joy with which he records their filthiness of body and soul. There is no more powerful and sinister touch in all Swift than the one in which Gulliver, on his return, is shown loathing the touch and odour of his own wife and children, so near are they to the detested race.

*His Later  
Writings.*

Two remarkable productions, *A Complete Collection of Genteel and Ingenious Conversation* (1738) and the *Directions to Servants*, were written shortly before the black period of insanity in which his life ended. The *Collection* is amusing and racy, the *Directions* are grim, biting, and full of Swift's ferocious misanthropy.

*His Verse.*

Throughout his life he wrote verse, very little of which rises to the level of poetry. An early Pindaric Ode elicited Dryden's



remark, 'Cousin Swift, you will never be a poet.' The *Windsor Prophecy*, *Fable of Midas*, and *Legion Club* are fierce and polemical. The *Journal of a Modern Lady* and *Lady's Dressing Room* embody his growing preoccupation with filth and decay in their relations to human life. Swift has left a good deal of easy occasional verse. His most celebrated poem is *Cadenus and Vanessa* (1713) which tells the tale of the ill-fated infatuation conceived for him by Hester Vanhomrigh. The prose *Journal to Stella* (1710-13) stands apart among Swift's writings. It was written from London, during the height of his connexion with the Tory leaders, to Esther Johnson, the woman whom he loved, yet, according to the best account, never married. It is a remarkable picture both of his life and hers, and of English politics and politicians. But for many its main interest lies in its revelation of the tenderness which could find place in Swift's haughty and savage soul.

Swift, as has been stated above, is beyond all reasonable doubt the greatest prose satirist in our language; and his satire, as the foregoing survey has shown, is an utterly different thing from that of either Steele or Addison. Both of these, in their several ways, had a kindly feeling for the men and women who were the objects of their ridicule or blame; and their kindness is never far to seek in their writings. Such a feeling, as we know from Swift's life, was strong in his nature; but it is seldom explicit in his writings, which are constantly kindled and made terrible by the will to destroy. Yet his scorn is an utterly different thing from the cold and acrid cynicism under which some writers have disguised their lack of heart: it is winged with passion, and is the outcome of a great idealism warped and foiled. Swift is a fierce angel, but he is not a lost or fallen one.

Swift, Steele, Addison, and perhaps Defoe, occupy a place apart in the prose of the period. Prominent among the rest was John Arbuthnot, High Tory, Court Physician to Queen Anne, and close friend of Pope, who addressed to him one of his most spirited verse epistles. Like Pope and Swift, he was a member of the Scriblerus Club, and as a result of this connexion he wrote the *Memoirs of Martinus Scriblerus*, a collection of satires ridiculing 'all the false tastes in learning'. He has left much miscellaneous writing; but his most famous work is certainly that racy political satire, the *History of John Bull*. He has much of Swift's wit and irony, yet he wielded these with a difference. He justified Thackeray's description of him as 'one of the wisest, wittiest, most accomplished, gentlest of mankind'.

More of Swift's bitterness appears in the writings of another of his friends, Henry St. John, Viscount Bolingbroke (1678-1751), the great Tory statesman. At different periods during his stormy career he founded political journals, and contributed freely to them. He wrote extensively on history and politics: left some instructive correspondence, inspired

His place  
among  
Satirists.

Arbuth-  
not.

Boling-  
broke.

Pope's *Essay on Man* through his philosophical speculations, and, in *A Letter to Sir William Wyndham*, has given the world a disingenuous but readable *apologia*. His *Idea of a Patriot King*—a king who besides reigning, governs wisely and in his people's interest—was widely read in its day, and has had some effect on later political thought, including Disraeli's. The eager, fiery quality of Bolingbroke's nature passes into his best prose, and gives it eloquence and a certain splendour—a splendour which seldom reaches sublimity. His writing is lucid and spirited, yet rarely profound. For all his qualities he leaves one with a strange sense of disappointment.

Shaftesbury.

In philosophy and theology, the age produced some notable writers. Anthony Ashley Cooper (1671–1713), third Earl of Shaftesbury and grandson of 'Achitophel', published his miscellaneous writings in 1711, under the title *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*. Throughout these he showed strong leanings toward Deism, and also strove to prove that the self-regarding principle of human conduct was reconcilable with the spirit of self-sacrifice. Shaftesbury's thought, though keen, is not of the first order: his style has the right eighteenth-century lucidity, but is mannered and over-polished.

Berkeley.

Greater than Shaftesbury, both in thought and style, is George Berkeley (1685–1753), one of the very first among English philosophers. From the metaphysical standpoint his chief works are his *Essay towards a New Theory of Vision* (1709) and the *Principles of Human Knowledge* (1710), in which he starts from Locke's standpoint, but subsequently transcends it, proving that matter has no existence apart from idea, and maintaining the existence of 'an omnipresent eternal Mind which knows and comprehends all things and exhibits them to our view in such a manner and according to such rules as He Himself hath ordained, and are by us termed laws of Nature'. In *Aleiphron, or the Minute Philosopher* (1732), he confutes the Deists, and others of the unorthodox, with remarkable grace, brilliancy, and force. His *Hylas*, also a dialogue, is more positive, and sets forth some of his main philosophic principles. *Siris* (1744) contains his celebrated testimony to the healing virtues of tar-water; but besides prescribing for this for the body, it prescribes idealism for the soul, and shows an increasing mysticism of outlook. Berkeley's style is not only clear and forcible, but possesses a delicacy and beauty all too rare in English philosophical writing. His use of irony in *Aleiphron* is superb. The earnestness and charm of his writings give him the same sway over his readers that he exerted in the flesh over his friends.

Joseph Butler.

Among the chief religious writers of the period are Joseph Butler, Bishop of Durham (1692–1752), and William Law (1686–1761). Butler's best-known work is *The Analogy of Religion, Natural and Revealed, to the Constitution and Course of Nature* (1736); but there is also much stimulating thought



in his *Fifteen Sermons* (1726). Lacking Berkeley's gift of style, Butler comes little short of him in intellectual profundity. Law is best known by his *Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* (1729), a book of great power and charm, which has profoundly affected many generations of Englishmen and has set its mark on thinkers so diverse as Charles Wesley and Samuel Johnson. Some of Law's most remarkable work was written during the latter part of his life, after he had come beneath the influence of the German mystic, Jacob Boehme.

Of lesser note are Samuel Clarke (1675–1729), philosopher Lesser and theologian; that highly unorthodox divine, Conyers Prose Middleton (1683–1750); and Francis Atterbury, Bishop of Writers. Rochester (1662–1732), scholar, critic, and friend and fellow-clubman of Swift and Pope. Bernard Mandeville (1670–1733), though far from religious himself, was the cause of much religious activity in others. His cynical *Fable of the Bees* (1723), which in its final form is part verse, part prose, brought replies from Hutcheson, Berkeley, Law, and others.

The main critical theories of the day have already been Critics. discussed in relation to their greater exponents. With these, as with lesser men, there was commonly an exaggerated reverence for classical example, frequently combined with a tendency to disparage preceding English poetry for its 'incorrectness' and failure to comply with the classical model. The *reductio ad absurdum* of all this may be found in the *Short View of Tragedy* (1692) of Thomas Rymer, in which Shakespeare is tried at the bar of 'correctness' and found guilty on several counts. Only slightly more discriminating is John Dennis, who, in his *Essay on Shakespeare* (1712), asserts that if Shakespeare 'had had the advantage of art and learning, he would have surpassed the very best and strongest of the Ancients'. Dennis has erudition and a certain force, and occasionally shows critical acumen. In some of Pope's most scornful lines, he is coupled with Charles Gildon, author of a book on *The English Dramatic Poets* (1691), to whom he is certainly superior. The greatest triumphs of Richard Bentley. Bentley (1662–1742) were won in the field of classical scholarship, and he was one of the greatest men who ever entered that field. His interest for ourselves lies chiefly in his controversial writings, which include his *Dissertation* (1699) on the so-called *Epistles of Phalaris*, and his *Remarks on the Discourse of Free-thinking* of Anthony Collins. Bentley writes strong trenchant English, and his great learning gives his treatises dignity and weight. It was unfortunate for his contemporary reputation that he incurred the wrath of the two most terrible satirists of his day—Swift, who attacked him in the *Battle of the Books*, and Pope, who made him the 'hero' of the Fourth Book of the *Dunciad*. The most unfortunate thing he ever did was to edit *Paradise Lost* as if it were a classical text, and to 'improve' it with his own emendations. We may pass from him to his chief castigator.

## CHAPTER XXI

## POPE AND QUEEN ANNE POETRY

The Poetry of Pope — His relation to his age — Qualities of Queen Anne poetry — Prior, Gay, Young — Minors.

Pope's  
Early  
Writings.

ALEXANDER POPE (1688–1744) from boyhood had set his heart on literary glory, and had tried to fit himself for its achievement by diligent reading and writing. Though his own testimony regarding the details of his life is in general untrustworthy, there is little exaggeration in his famous profession :

As yet a child, nor yet a fool to fame,  
I lisp'd in numbers, for the numbers came.

The trend of his youthful genius was moulded by the greater genius of Dryden, for whom he expressed the deepest admiration and reverence. He had read widely in English, French, and classical literature, achieving his knowledge of Homer and Ovid partly at first hand, partly through the translations of Ogilby and Sandys. His first essays in poetry found favour with the judicious :

Granville the polite,  
And knowing Walsh would tell me I could write.

In 1709 he published in Tonson's Miscellany the *Pastorals* of which he afterwards writes :

Like gentle Fanny's was my flowery theme,  
A painted mistress, or a purling stream.

The *Essay*  
on *Criti-*  
*cism.*

These poems were doubtless suggested by Nature, as Pope had seen her in the pleasant home of his boyhood at Binfield ; but if we may judge from his references to her, he was not profoundly stirred by her beauty, as Milton and Wordsworth in their youthful verse show themselves to have been stirred by a similar sojourn. These poems are prentice work, and are chiefly noticeable for their metrical smoothness and perfection, and for certain passages of pleasant fancy. More notable is his *Essay on Criticism*, written when he was twenty-one, and published in 1711. This work contains little original thought, being largely an exhortation to follow the classics, in the sense prescribed by Boileau, Le Bossu, and their English followers ; but it is of value as showing what the age of reason meant by poetry and by poetry's concomitants, 'nature', 'wit', 'understanding', and 'the rules'. Pope's heroic couplet is here polished, incisive, and antithetical, though it has not achieved the happy colloquialism of his later work. *Windsor Forest* (1713) has some fine descriptive passages, and represents a great advance on the earlier *Pastorals*.

The *Rape*  
of the  
*Lock.*

In 1712 Pope published the first draft of *The Rape of the Lock*, a poem celebrating in light and spirited mock-heroic verse the



exploit of a certain Lord Petre, who had cut a lock from the hair of the beautiful Arabella Fermor during an entertainment at Hampton. There is nothing more delicately playful in the language than Pope's description of 'Belinda's' toilet. He here had a subject which suited him exactly, inasmuch as it evoked fancy without challenging imagination. We may agree with Dr. Johnson 'that the *Rape of the Lock* is the most airy, the most ingenious and the most delightful of all Pope's compositions'. In 1714 the poem was published in a revised form, with the ingenious additional 'machinery' of the sylphs.

In 1717 Pope published two poems, the *Elegy to the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady* and *Eloisa to Abelard*, which represent an element of passion and romance very rare in his work. The *Elegy* deals with a subject similar to that of Swinburne's beautiful *Choriambics*—the suicide of a young and beautiful woman. Such romantic intensity as inspires this poem and *Eloisa* has seldom been achieved in the end-stopped couplet.

Pope had now achieved the literary glory which he so eagerly desired. Addison and Swift, the greatest of living English writers, had recognized his genius, and had admitted him as wellnigh their equal: he had either gained, or was on the way to gain, the friendship of Oxford, Bolingbroke, Atterbury, Arbuthnot, Peterborough, and other leading men of the day. This popularity was turned to practical account through the publication of his translation of the *Iliad* (1715–20), to which everybody of importance in England subscribed. This book brought him an increase both of money and fame. It was a daring thing for one knowing but little Greek to think of translating Homer at all; and it was hardly less daring for such a one to choose the end-stopped rhyming couplet as the equivalent of the Homeric hexameter. This metre could never be adopted for an epic in an age which, like our own, had been familiarized with the freely over-run couplets of *Tristram of Lyonesse*, or with the longer and more swinging couplets of *Sigurd the Volsung*. Pope's version is neither Homer nor is it magnificent. It lacks the simplicity so justly postulated by Matthew Arnold as an essential of good Homeric translation, and it lacks, too, the speed and fire which constantly inspire Chapman's version. Yet it has been greatly praised by great men, and possesses both vigour and distinction. Less excellent, and less successful, is his translation of the *Odyssey*, in which he was helped by Fenton and Broome.

Pope's early works, as we have seen, had brought him reputation: his Homer gave him supremacy. But his success had made him many enemies, especially among the Grub Street critics of the day; and against these, and his rivals, he directed his next work, *The Dunciad* (1728). This great and terrible satire originally consisted of three books, and took for its 'hero' Theobald, who had published an edition of Shakespeare that challenged Pope's, and in the opinion of posterity, has surpassed it. Later, a fourth book was added, with Bentley for its butt.

His  
Homer.

The  
Dunciad.

In a subsequent edition of the poem, Theobald was displaced in favour of Colley Cibber, the famous actor and playwright, who had slighted Pope and had never been forgiven. Besides these worthies, there were a host of minor victims—the critics Dennis and Gildon, orator Henley, Hervey the fop, and the rascally publisher, Curll. Pope's satire is more virulent and personal, less large and Olympian, than that of Dryden, his master and model. Much of the *Dunciad* is of a more than Swiftian foulness: yet the poem's wit and satire and fierce joy make it readable to most men at some moments and in some moods. Pope's *Essay on Man*, much praised in England in its own day, and still regarded in foreign countries as his greatest work, is brilliant and well finished rather than comprehensive or profound. The *Moral Essays* (1731–35) are an offshoot of it and deal with riches, taste, and the characters of men and women. But the best of Pope's later work consists of his *Epistles* and *Satires* in imitation of Horace, in which he returns to the satiric and colloquial vein, which perhaps represents his greatest strength. The *Prologue to the Satires* (or the *Epistle to Arbuthnot*) has well been called his Apologia, and contains his celebrated lines on Addison. The *Epistle to Augustus* directs some deadly irony at George II and embodies a good deal of instructive literary comment and criticism. These later *Satires* contain Pope's most satisfying, though not his most ambitious, work. His couplet here has all its old strength, together with a certain new ease and flexibility. His language has developed the flow and liveliness of the best conversation. It is sensible, witty, and, at its best, urbane: to offer more was hardly within the power of the man or his century.

His  
*Essays*  
and  
*Satires*.

The Age  
of Pope.

Pope represents many essential qualities of his age. Thoroughly in accordance with eighteenth-century standards is the imitation of the Ancients which he preached in his *Essay on Criticism*, and practised in his later epistles. In the spirit of his age, too, are his insistence on 'the Rules' of poetry, his belief that those Rules might be deduced from a close study of classical writers, his conviction that these writers had exhausted 'Nature', and that the Moderns could only realize her through their medium, his constant inculcation of order and restraint, and his belief that these qualities could only find their highest expression in the end-stopped couplet. Yet this common matter is adapted to new ends with astonishing tact and skill. That each of these poems should rank as a masterpiece indicates at once the strength and the limitations of its author. It shows with what determination and success he could put his theories into practice; but it also shows that his triumphs, and the triumphs of his age, could be compassed through sheer ingenuity. Not thus was written the great poetry of the age of Wordsworth. When this is inspired by classical influence, as in *Hyperion*, *Laodamia*, and *Prometheus Unbound*, there has been a free rehandling of an original theme, and the miracle has been wrought, not through imitation, but



through imagination working in obedience to its own law. It is significant, moreover, that, despite Pope's Homer, he, like Dryden and Johnson, was far more strongly influenced by Roman literature than by Greek. The reverse is the case when we pass to Keats and Shelley, each of whom was profoundly swayed by Greek thought and poetry. The resultant poetry manifests not only a new profundity and freedom, but an utterly changed outlook.

This change reappears strikingly in the different views of Nature conceived during the two periods. Perhaps never in the course of English literature was her name more often cited by writers in prose or verse; but the Nature which appears in Pope's *Essay on Man*, and even in Young's *Night Thoughts*, was not so much a thing different from the Nature of *Lines written above Tintern Abbey* or *Lewti*, as one in direct conflict with it. Nature with the generation of Pope had meant largely the common sense of man fortified by such logical arguments of analogy and design as could be derived from the order of the universe: there is barely a hint of the Power with which Wordsworth was to hold solitary and mystical communing. Imagination, which with Coleridge was to mean inspiration, in Addison meant little more than rhetorical ingenuity, and natural beauty, which to Coleridge and Scott could only be sublime in its wildest aspects, was most delightful to the average Augustan when trimmed and pruned to the compass of a garden. Pope is in many ways the symbol of this spirit. Not only does he exemplify many of his generation's opinions regarding literature and life, but he possesses in an astonishing degree the polish and brilliancy which it prized so highly, and for which it has been so highly prized by posterity. But in certain other essential qualities of the Age of Reason, Pope is conspicuously deficient. He lacks its calm, and has small measure of its broad sanity. He lacks the magnanimity of its greatest characters; and his high-pitched energy is a thing more febrile and less elemental than the massive strength of Dryden before, and of Johnson after, him. Yet any theory of criticism which denies him the title of a great poet is sadly lacking in breadth and insight.

The polish and urbanity of the age is richly evident in the style of Matthew Prior (1664-1721), who is a master of lighter English verse in more than one of its kinds. Little value now attaches to his more serious and pretentious poems, *Solomon on the Vanity of the World*, and the *Carmen Saeculare* in honour of William III. Under the title *Henry and Emma* he attempted to re-write in couplets the beautiful fourteenth-century *Nut-brown Maid*: with such measure, or lack, of success as may be gathered from the lines:

Prior.

Now night advanced. The house in sleep were laid,  
The nurse experienced and the prying maid;  
And last that sprite which does incessant haunt  
The lover's steps, the ancient maiden aunt.

His semi-Hudibrastic *Alma, or the Progress of the Mind*, a poem in three cantos, contains some lively strokes of wit, but often wearies, generally through over-ingenuity. Prior had considerable learning, and, even in *Alma*, was by no means a superficial thinker; but his real strength lies in his lighter and shorter pieces. He writes *vers d'occasion* with great wit and charm, and here anticipates Praed and Dobson. A masterpiece in this kind is his poem to *A Child of Quality*.—‘five years old, the author forty’:

Nor quality nor reputation  
 Forbid me yet my flame to tell;  
 Dear five-years-old befriends my passion,  
 And I may write till she can spell.

Not less admirable are *The Secretary*, a brief and lively description of a pleasure-jaupt at The Hague, and the *Ballad of Down Hall*, which narrates with glee and gusto his journey into Essex in search of a house. Very delightful, too, is *The Female Phaeton*, with its concluding stanza:

Fondness prevailed, mamma gave way,  
 Kitty at heart's desire  
 Obtained the chariot for a day,  
 And set the world on fire.

Prior has left two or three coarse and racy *fabliaux*: he concludes one poem approximating to this kind—*The English Padlock*—with a moral at once sane and charming. His finest piece of humorous character-drawing is the inimitable *Jinny the Just*:

Her will with her duty so equally stood  
 That, seldom opposed, she was commonly good,  
 And did pretty well, doing just what she would.

Some parts of the Bible by heart she recited,  
 And much in historical chapters delighted,  
 But in points about faith she was something shortsighted.

So notions and modes she referred to the schools,  
 And in matters of conscience adhered to two rules,  
 To advise with no bigots and jest with no fools.

In the *Lines written in Mezaray's History of France*, Prior's humour, without ceasing to be humour, takes a serious and beautiful turn. His best love poems—*Chloe and Euphelia*, *Farewell*, *Aminta*, and the *Better Answer to Chloe*, are in lighter vein. He has perhaps written the wittiest verse epigrams in the language: among the best of his quotable things in this kind is *The Remedy* (‘I sent for Ratcliffe’). Attention has recently been drawn to the prosodic importance of much of his verse.<sup>1</sup> Though he used at need the almost universal measure of his day, the heroic couplet, it did not satisfy him, and he spoke out

<sup>1</sup> See George Saintsbury, *History of English Prosody*, vol. ii, pp. 423–5.



about its shortcomings in the *Preface to Solomon*. He sought refuge from it in many other measures—blank verse, the ‘Pindaric’ and Spenserian stanzas, rhyming octosyllables, and, above all things, in the free anapaestic measures of his own devising. Of his four prose *Dialogues of the Dead*, the most amusing is that in which the discursive and remorseless Montaigne talks Locke’s logical method out to a ribald *reductio ad absurdum*.

John Gay (1685–1732) was most famous to his own age Gay. through *The Beggar’s Opera* (1728): with posterity he is more popular through the *Fables* (1727). The *Opera*, like *The What D’Ye Call It*, *Polly*, and his remaining dramatic pieces, has lost much of its savour for modern palates. Yet the lyrics scattered throughout all of these are at least sprightly, and *The What D’Ye Call It* contains one number, ‘*Twas when the seas were roaring*, worthy to rank with Gay’s most popular ballad, *Black-eyed Susan*. The *Fables* are ingenious and shrewd, and are written in flowing and occasionally slipshod octosyllables. Despite their popularity his best work is not to be found here, nor in his youthful blank verse poem, *Wine*, nor yet in *Rural Sports* (1713), the rhyming eclogues which he wrote in respectful imitation of Pope’s *Pastorals*. His poem on ‘that agreeable machine’ *The Fan*, attempts to be mock-heroic, but is merely pseudo-heroic and frigid. Far more amusing is *The Shepherd’s Week* (1714), a series of burlesque eclogues written at Pope’s instigation as a *reductio ad absurdum* of the sickly ‘pastoral’ method of Ambrose—or ‘namby-pamby’—Philips. In his satirical preface, Gay has his fling at his victim’s ‘fine finical newfangle fooleries’, and claims to have introduced his readers to ‘plain, downright, hearty, cleanly folk’. ‘Cleanliness’ is hardly the most obvious quality of Sparabella, Bumkinet, Grubbinol, Bowzybee, and the rest of his creations, whose humours are often as quaintly diverting as their names. Thus Bumkinet sings of his deceased mistress, Blouzelind:

But now, alas! these ears shall hear no more  
 The whining swine surround the dairy door,  
 No more her care shall fill the hollow tray,  
 To fat the guzzling hogs with floods of whey.  
 Lament, ye swine, in grunting spend your grief,  
 For you, like me, have lost your sole relief.

Of Gay’s remaining long poems the most successful, despite its unevenness of execution, is *Trivia, or the Art of Walking the Streets of London* (1715). It throws a vivid light on the London of its day, and contains at least one admirable mock-heroic passage, besides many finely-etched portraits of contemporary types. The wanderer encounters blustering hackney coachmen, football-playing prentices, drunken chairmen, such midnight roysterers as the ‘Nicker’, the ‘Scowrer’, and the ‘Mohock’: and, ‘where Catherine Street descends into the Strand,’ he

lights on a street-walker, perhaps the most masterly-drawn figure of the poem. Both Gay's *Epistles* and his *Eclogues* contain admirably witty and ingenious strokes. Best among the *Epistles* is perhaps *Mr. Pope's Welcome from Greece*, written in smooth octaves, and presenting brief and lively portraits of famous contemporaries. Among the most brilliant of the *Eclogues* is the *Tea-Table*, a poem compact of scandal, spite, and wit.

Young.

The first poem of Edward Young (1681–1765) was *The Last Day* (1713), which, like its successor, *The Force of Religion* (1714), was written in the heroic couplet, and in its combination of gloom and rhetoric, anticipates the later and more famous *Night Thoughts*. In 1719 appeared his first play, the heroic, or pseudo-heroic, *Busiris*, and in 1721 his more famous tragedy, *The Revenge*. His lengthy satire, *The Universal Passion* (1725–1728), contains many shrewd strokes and vivid portraits, and has a great deal of Pope's power, with less of his ferocity. But his most important poem, and the only one now widely read, is *The Complaint, or Night Thoughts on Life, Death and Immortality* (1742–44), written when its author was over sixty. This expanded title accurately indicates not only the tenor of the poem, but the spirit of querulousness and gloom in which it is conceived. In point of form its most obvious quality is perhaps its rhetoric—rhetoric often swollen with conceits and sometimes lapsing into utter bathos. Readers, according to their different temperaments, may feel amused or irritated at such stuff as this :

Though grey our heads, our thoughts and aims are green,  
Like damaged clocks whose hand and bell dissent,  
Folly sings six, while Nature points at twelve ;

or

the sun,  
Rude drunkard, rising rosy from the main !

or

One eye on Death and one full fixed on heaven,  
Becomes a mortal and immortal man ;

or

O Britain, infamous for suicide !  
An island in thy manners ! far disjoined  
From the whole world of rationals beside !

Yet often the rhetoric has the right eighteenth-century point and power, as when he writes :

'Tis not in folly not to scorn a fool,

and

Were death denied, even fools would wish to die,

and

Oh give eternity ! or thought destroy !



Sometimes it takes on a more marked and individual colour,  
as in

Why this so sumptuous insult o'er our heads ?  
Why this illustrious canopy displayed ?  
Why so magnificently lodged Despair ?

and sometimes it is no longer rhetoric, but becomes pure poetry  
as in

this gloom of Night  
With all her wealth, with all her radiant worlds,

and

I gaze, and as I gaze, my mounting soul  
Catches strange fire, eternity, at thee,

and

Prisoner of earth and pent beneath the moon.

Young's sense of form is crude and uncertain, and where he uses rhyme, as in his Odes (*Ocean*, 1728; *Imperium Pelagi*, 1729, &c.), he is constantly intolerable. Even in the less risky medium of blank verse he can write lines like

What smooth emollients in theology  
Recumbent virtue's downy doctors preach.

But he has probably had less than his due from modern criticism, and in the *Night Thoughts* he often achieves power, and sometimes beauty. Less praise can be given to his last poem, *Resignation* (1762).

The remaining poets of the period can only receive brief Lesser notice. Lady Winchelsea (1660-1720), who is Pope's 'Ardelia', Poets. and appears 'meditating song' in Gay's *Welcome from Greece*, wrote Pindaric Odes, including one on *The Spleen* (1701); also *The Prodigy* (1706) and *Miscellany Poems* (1714). Wordsworth commended her *Nocturnal Reverie* on account of its feeling for Nature. There is merit both in her light and her serious verse; and she has the distinction of having supplied a famous phrase to Pope and a beautiful idea to Shelley. Samuel Garth (1660-1718), like Arbuthnot, was a physician, and his chief work, *The Dispensary* (1699), is a burlesque poem in couplets on a contemporary quarrel between physicians and apothecaries. Sir Richard Blackmore (1650-1729) wrote long, sometimes inordinately long, poems—*Prince Arthur* (1695), *King Arthur* (1697), *Job* (1700), *Eliza* (1705), and *Creation* (1712). The last was praised by Addison and condoned by Johnson. Modern criticism regards most of Blackmore's work as past possibility or hope of condonation. Blackmore, if he could hardly write poetry, had the gift of evoking sarcasm, and having the misfortune to live a long life in a satirical age he suffered in his earlier years at the hands of Dryden, and in his later at those of Pope and Gay. 'Granville the polite' (Lord Lansdowne) and 'knowing Walsh', both of whom wrote far from contemptible verse, are familiar through Pope's grateful acknowledgement of encouragement received from them. The

*Pastorals* of Ambrose Philips (1675–1749) have already been discussed in relation to Pope and Gay. Thomas Tickell (1688–1740), the protégé of Addison and butt of Pope, left much miscellaneous and mediocre work, but will always be remembered by his noble and fervent elegy on Addison. Thomas Parnell (1679–1718) lives chiefly through three pieces—*The Hermit*, most popular throughout the eighteenth century but now less thought of; and the more distinguished *Nightpiece on Death* and *Hymn to Contentment*. John Philips (1676–1709) wrote an amusing Miltonic parody or burlesque called *The Splendid Shilling*. His poem on *Cider* is satirically referred to in Gay's poem on *Wine*, which it probably suggested. The smaller fry of this period are numerous, but they are not for our net.

## CHAPTER XXII

### THE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY NOVEL

Rise and progress of the Novel — Richardson, Fielding, Smollett, Sterne — Minors.

Growing  
Vogue of  
the Novel.

WE have already traced the English novel through various stages, and have shown how it evolved toward realism through the 'character' writers and the 'Spectator', and emerged full-fledged in the fiction of Defoe. Since the Revolution, the drama, for reasons to be specified, had steadily decayed, and with that decay the novel had gained considerably in vogue. With such writers as Mrs. Manley and Mrs. Haywood, it became largely a chronicle of scandal, rendered more piquant by thinly-veiled portraiture of contemporary characters;<sup>1</sup> but Addison and Swift had endeavoured, each after his own way, to make literature the guardian of society, and the Addisonian essay, which has often marked affinities with the novel, had been given a direct, if not very profound, moral aim. This ethical purpose appears under a much more sincere and intense form in the religion of the English middle class, who were now gaining greatly in social power and influence. The older Puritanism, of which they had been the stronghold during the Elizabethan period, had regained at the Revolution much that it had lost at the Restoration, and subsequently received a fresh lease in the teaching of Wesley and Young. Both morals and religion were lit with a new fervour, and the old Puritanical austerity was quickened and humanized by a fervent emotionalism. This earnestness of feeling is combined

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Professor Sir Walter Raleigh, *The English Novel*, pp. 138–9, who shows that Mrs. Haywood's later and better novels, *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless* (1751) and *The History of Jemmy and Jenny Jessamy* (1753), are strongly affected by the new influences of Richardson, Fielding, and Smollett.



with a new realism of presentation in the novels of Samuel Richardson (1689-1761).

As a boy he had been precocious both in sentiment and conduct, and was originally intended for the Church. His first novel, *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded*, did not appear till 1740, when he was over fifty. His friends, the publishers Messrs. Rivington and Osborne, had desired him to write 'a book of familiar letters on the useful concerns in common life', and this he did with an aim at once moral and anti-romantic. He wished to turn young people away from 'the pomp and parade of romance writing' into courses which 'might promote the cause of religion and virtue'. In this mood he bethought him of a story he had heard many years before of virtue tempted and persecuted, yet resisting and, in the end, winning the decent triumph of marriage. From these beginnings sprang *Pamela*, the tale of a girl left dependent on the libertine son of her dead mistress. She continues to stay beneath his roof while he makes repeated but unsuccessful attempts upon her virtue, treating her with every circumstance of insolence and perfidy. Yet in the end the reader is expected to be greatly edified by finding that the heart of 'Mr. B.' has been softened by her resistance, and that he offers her marriage, which she accepts with trembling gratitude. It is not too much to say with Sir Walter Raleigh, that in *Pamela* 'the prudential doctrine appears in its earliest and most disgusting form'. Yet the novel had an astonishing vogue throughout the country, for reasons by no means difficult to appreciate. The extraordinary subtlety and care which went to the description of Pamela and her sufferings, have still their hold on Richardson's readers; and for all the novel's length and ethical fustiness, it is impossible not to feel interested in its heroine and villain, in good Mrs. Jervis and odious Mrs. Jewkes, and in the well-meaning 'college novice', Mr. Williams. Far less interesting are the two volumes subsequently added by Richardson, which show Pamela married and still triumphant over temptation.

A far greater novel is *Clarissa, or the History of a Young Lady* (1747-48). Richardson's moral earnestness, instead of being cheapened into prudentialism, is here heightened into tragedy. The book's prime purpose is still ethical, and it aims at showing 'the distresses that may attend the misconduct both of parents and children in relation to marriage'. Lovelace entices Clarissa from her home, and pursues her with his love through the book's first six lengthy volumes. In the end he has his will and overcomes her, though not her virtue. She languishes and dies, and he falls in a duel by the hand of her kinsman, Colonel Morden. Such is the plot of this great novel, which was not only read by all England in its day, but had subsequently a profound effect upon European thought and feeling. Throughout its eight volumes the action is scanty, and apart from the central catastrophe, trivial. The same

Richardson—  
*Pamela.*

*Clarissa*  
*Harlowe.*

minuteness is shown in describing Lovelace's tactics and Clarissa's emotions of despair, religious faith and hope, and stifled love for her tormentor. Yet, despite its length, *Clarissa* remains as readable to-day as when it moved Macaulay to tears. Its appeal is due first and foremost to Richardson's masterly touch on the feminine heart and soul, and to his poignant sense of the tragedy implicit in such a seduction as Clarissa's. Lovelace, too, with his refinement, his great gifts, and his artistic reservations in villainy, remains, when criticism has done its worst upon him, a vastly interesting figure. The novel's obvious defects are more than redeemed by the presence of a great idea, on the whole greatly carried out.

*Sir Charles Grandison.* Still longer than *Clarissa*, but far less great, is *Sir Charles Grandison* (1753-54). Here the drawbacks of Richardson's method, which is ultimately the sentimental, become very apparent. Sir Charles is the perfect man, and he knows it, and several women know it too, and worship him adoringly. In Meredith's hands he would have been matter for comedy, and might have been profitably put to the test which wrought such havoc on Sir Willoughby Patterne. Or he might have figured in tragedy, in which case his perfections, like Clarissa's, would have become interesting. Attended as they are by his own self-complacency and the admiration of all and sundry, they are little less than odious; and when he confers himself magnanimously on the grateful Harriet Byron, we wish to be shown him suing to Clara Middleton, or even to Laetitia Dale. Yet, repulsive as the hero is, he is drawn with much psychological power, as are also Clementina, Sir Hargrave Pollexfen, and the minors of the tale.

*Fielding—Dramas.* There is much of the woman in Richardson's character and method, but Henry Fielding (1707-1754), who planned his first novel as a burlesque of *Pamela*, was one of the most masculine intelligences in the history of our literature. He began his literary career with two plays written in imitation of Congreve—*Love in Several Masques* (1728) and *The Temple Beau* (1730). Miss Oldfield's acting helped the first to success, but neither possesses much merit. *The Author's Farce* and *The Pleasures of the Town* (1730) are no longer imitative, but develop that satirical vein in which Fielding was to excel, and draw a racy picture of London literary life. Other plays followed, including Fielding's best work in drama, *The Tragedy of Tragedies, or The Life and Death of Tom Thumb the Great* (1731). This has been justly described as 'one of the best burlesques ever written'. In 1736 Fielding produced *Pasquin* and *The Historical Register* at the Little Theatre (Haymarket), of which he had become the lessee. In 1739 he edited *The Champion*, a paper largely modelled on *The Spectator*, but substituting for Sir Roger, Will Honeycomb and their club, the much less successful Vinegar family.

*Joseph Andrews.* A far more important piece of work came from his hand in 1742. *Pamela* had seemed namby-pamby work to Fielding's



robust mind ; and he resolved to write a novel which should be its *reductio ad absurdum*. He therefore invented a brother for Pamela, the footman Joseph, whose virtue was attacked by his mistress, Lady Booby, even as Pamela's had been attacked by 'Mr. B.'. Thus were conceived the amusing opening scenes of *Joseph Andrews* (1742) which introduce the rascally and inimitable confidante, Mrs. Slipslop. But beneath Fielding's hand the novel soon grew beyond its original scope, and ceasing to be a burlesque, became a rollicking romance in its own right. As soon as that muscular Christian, scholar, and fantastic, Parson Adams, appears upon the scene, he takes precedence of Joseph and his sweetheart Fanny, and for all readers becomes the lovable and admirable, if ludicrous, hero of the book. A more odious fantastic is the hog-fancying Parson Trulliber.

Fielding's three volumes of *Miscellanies* (1743) contain, besides much other work, the admirable Lucianic dialogue, *A Journey from this World to the Next*, and *The History of the Life of the Late Mr. Jonathan Wild the Great*. Mr. Austin Dobson has justly styled this book 'a model of sustained and sleepless irony'. The irony is directed toward showing that worldly greatness, as commonly understood, and as embodied in the career of the famous thief-taker, is a thing infinitely superior to virtue. 'Jonathan Wild', says Fielding, 'had every qualification necessary to form a great man. He was entirely free from those low vices of modesty and good nature, which, as he said, implied a total negation of human greatness, and were the only qualities which absolutely rendered a man incapable of making a considerable figure in the world.' Such a passage as this, both in form and spirit, suggests the writings of M. Anatole France, who also resembles Fielding in his admiration for the moral goodness that is founded in humility ; but Fielding's irony is a far fiercer thing than that of the great Frenchman, which 'disarms anger' and helps to sweeten life.

*Jonathan  
Wild, &c.*

In 1749 Fielding published his masterpiece, *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling*. Here there was no longer, as in *Joseph Andrews*, a divided purpose of construction : Fielding puts confidently forth into that 'new province of writing' which he claimed to have discovered. He avoids 'the highest life' as affording 'very little Humour or Entertainment', and aspires to fill 'his pages with Humour till mankind learn the Goodnature to laugh at the follies of others and the Humility to grieve at their own'. The love story between Tom and the charming Sophia Western is told realistically, and without any of that false sentiment which Fielding attributed to Richardson. We find here treated in Comedy the theme presented tragically in *Richard Feverel*—that of a woman whose lover is unfaithful to her, yet still loves her. Lady Bellenden, Tom's fair and unscrupulous seducer, is drawn with masterly and merciless power. Less masterly, perhaps, is the portrait of the villain,

*Tom  
Jones.*

Bliffl; but Squire Western, the racy and brutal, and the grotesque schoolmaster, Partridge, are vital and unforgettable.

*Amelia.*

*Amelia* (1751), Fielding's last novel, has not the width and sweep of *Tom Jones*, but in the portrayal of its chief character it shows deeper pathos and insight. *Amelia*, the wife who realizes clearly her husband's wrongdoing against her, and feels it intensely, but forgives and even forgets it, is drawn with the greatest feeling and beauty. In hands less sure, such a character might have become insipid, and even imbecile; but Fielding has given her not only sentiment but soul and brain. Hardly less mastery is shown in the drawing of the dissolute Miss Matthews.

Fielding, despite the prejudiced verdict of Johnson, certainly must take precedence of Richardson as a writer of prose fiction. He first gave classic form to the English novel, and made it a thing of symmetry and power, using free, clear, and vigorous language to describe the common life of men. Both in feeling and style he ensues the essential things, and in his highest work he has mastered the twin arts of construction and omission. His genius first put the English novel on a level with English poetry and drama.

*Smollett.*

Tobias George Smollett (1721-1771), like Fielding, began as a dramatist, writing in 1739 his unsuccessful blank verse tragedy, *The Regicide*. During the succeeding years he published several pieces of satirical verse, but his first novel, *The Adventures of Roderick Random*, did not appear till 1748. He states in the preface that in writing it he has followed the scheme of Le Sage's *Gil Blas*, with certain modifications. The Spanish picaresque novel had been familiar to England, in translations, from the sixteenth century onwards, and the form had been handled independently and successfully by Defoe and others. Smollett took it and moulded it to his own desire, importing into it much satire of his enemies, and some autobiography. Many of the nautical scenes which give *Roderick Random* its racy and distinctive flavour, represent his own experience, for he had been a naval surgeon in Vernon's ill-starred expedition to Cartagena. The novel was an immediate success, and was succeeded by *Peregrine Pickle* (1751), *Ferdinand, Count Fathom* (1752), *Sir Launcelot Greaves* (1760), and *Humphry Clinker* (1771). Roughly speaking, these conform to a common type, and have little plot or construction. *Peregrine Pickle* is from first to last a series of elaborate practical jokes perpetrated by its scapegrace 'hero' and his assistants, on all and sundry. The most attractive and memorable character in the book is Peregrine's uncle, the old sea-dog, Commodore Hawser Trunnion. The description of his household, 'The Garrison', and his housemates, Captain Jack Hatchway and Tom Pipes, is inimitably rollicking and vivacious. Far less successful novels are *Count Fathom* and *Sir Launcelot Greaves*, which respectively describe a scoundrel—clearly suggested by Fielding's Jonathan Wild—and a



modern Don Quixote. Smollett's greatest novel is his last, *Humphry Clinker*, a story, mainly farcical, of adventure in England and Scotland, which contains such brilliant figures of comedy as the irascible yet tender-hearted Squire, Matthew Bramble, his sour sister Tabitha, and the gossiping servant maid, Winifred Jenkins, whose ill-spelt letters are masterpieces of ingenious fooling. But the greatest character of the book, the greatest indeed that Smollett ever drew, is Lismahago, the proud and needy Scottish soldier of fortune, a worthy prototype of Rittmeister Dugald Dalgetty.

Judged even by the most liberal modern standard, Smollett's novels are coarse, brutal, and frequently cruel. Most of them are rife with that fierce rancour which was deep-seated in his nature. Even in his most mellow work, *Humphry Clinker*, there is little of the broad charity and sympathy which are never far to seek in Fielding, even in his most satirical moments. On the other hand, Smollett's three best novels have a splendid vitality, and his best descriptive passages—for example that very gruesome one of the ship's hospital in *Roderick Random*—are admirably vivid. In *Roderick Random* he dealt authentically with the sailor, practically for the first time in English fiction. Smollett is also important through his influence on succeeding novelists—notably on Charles Dickens. His chief remaining works are his erudite and popular *History of England* (1757–65), his entertaining account of his *Travels through France and Italy* (1766), and his rancorous and Rabelaisian political lampoon, *The Adventures of an Atom* (1769). His poetry can find no mention here.

Many, indeed most, of Smollett's best-remembered types were eccentrics; but there was little that was eccentric in his presentation of them. The method of Laurence Sterne (1713–1768), however, is as whimsical as any of his characters; indeed, his peculiar position in English literature depends largely on his personal attitude, or attitudes, towards life. His great novel, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gent.*, did not appear till he was forty-seven. It is safe to say that the reading public has never been so gulled by a book's title, and that never has the gulling been so greatly to its advantage. So far is the work from being a 'Life' of Tristram Shandy, that, as has been frequently pointed out, he is not born till the third volume, and makes no appearance at all in the seventh and eighth. The 'opinions', moreover, on which the book hangs, are those, not of Tristram, but of the crotchety philosopher, his father, a figure 'humorous' as any in Jonson, yet handled with a quite un-Jonsonian lightness and inconsequence. Yet not even Walter Shandy holds the honours of the novel: these must be parted between Uncle Toby, perhaps the most finely-drawn English eccentric outside Shakespeare, and his faithful servant and fellow-campaigner, Corporal Trim. These characters, together with the widow Wadman, Mrs. Shandy, and Dr. Slop, help to make up a work

Sterne—  
*Tristram*  
*Shandy.*

which is at once Rabelaisian, sentimental, pathetic, whimsical, and prurient. Its whole method depends on whimsicality and surprise, and on scorn of method as commonly understood and practised in fiction. Much of Sterne's sensibility is mawkish and forced, but a good deal of it is real and moving, and passes quite naturally into that humour which Thackeray denied him, but which is delightfully present on almost every page he wrote.

*The Sentimental Journey.*

*The Sentimental Journey* is a slighter thing than *Tristram Shandy*, but to many it is equally precious. Every one remembers the simple-minded valet, La Fleur, and the adventures of Yorick with the snuff-taking monk, and with the beautiful grisette of the periwig shop. Here, too, in the meditations on the captive starling, and the dead ass, appears that sensibility to the fate and suffering of animals which was to reappear with more simplicity and sincerity in Cowper. Certain critics of our own day have made far too much of Sterne's prurience, and far too little of his more positive and delectable qualities.

Lesser Novelists.

Each of the four great writers discussed in this chapter<sup>1</sup> gave the novel new significance and opportunity, and helped to make possible its manifold modern developments. Before their day its activities had been groping and tentative, and its position inferior: after they had written, it took its place in English as a classic kind beside lyric and drama. All the four, but especially Richardson and Smollett, were freely imitated by the minor novelists of their day. More important than such imitations are *The History of Pompey the Little* (1751) and Charles Johnstone's *Chrysal, or The Adventures of a Guinea* (1760), both of which develop from the picaresque novel, but are given a strongly satirical turn. The first describes the adventures of a lap-dog, which, like the guinea, frequently changes hands, and is made the medium for much shrewd hitting at contemporary characters. Of a certain importance in their different kinds are *David Simple* (1744), a moderately successful novel of character by Fielding's sister Sarah; *Almorán and Hamet* (1761), by Dr. Hawkesworth, written after the model of *Rasselas*, but more tediously; and *Peter Wilkins* (1751), by Robert Paltock, a novel of miraculous adventure, chiefly memorable for its charming heroine, the winged Youwarkee. There is interest, if not method, in the madness of Thomas Amory's *John Bunicle* (1756), a strange novel much admired by Hazlitt.

<sup>1</sup> The novels of Goldsmith and Johnson are discussed under the heading of their general work; and one or two late minors of the period are reserved for a subsequent chapter.



## CHAPTER XXIII

## EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY DRAMA

Causes of the Drama's decay — The new staging — Dramatic types and tendencies — Classical and romantic plays — Domestic dramas : Lillo and others — Sentimental drama — Comedy and burlesque — Sheridan.

THE most splendid period of the English theatre—the only one, indeed, during which great poetic drama regularly held the stage—falls between the year 1587, which saw the production of Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*, and 1642, when the theatres were closed. After this there was practically no dramatic production till 1660, when a new activity began, consummate in at least one of its kinds, if less splendid and various than the old. The Comedy of Manners persisted in the hands of Vanbrugh and Farquhar till the first decade of the eighteenth century, thus reaching up to the comedies of Steele, which already show signs of the growing taste for sentiment. Till this period English drama had been for a century and a quarter in close touch with English literature, and had, indeed, ranked as one of its highest kinds. But it had already lost quality shortly after the eighteenth century began ; and that entire century only produced two playwrights whose work is of high literary worth. We may anticipate by saying that this divorce between the stage and literature has remained all but absolute until our own day. The nineteenth century was by no means barren of literary drama ; indeed, in poetic drama it was particularly rich : yet comparatively few of its poetic plays ever came upon the stage, and those which did seldom held their place. This strange and unsatisfactory state of affairs needs closer examination.

Various causes have been assigned for the decline of eighteenth-century drama. It is said that the literary play was crushed out by the growth of less literary rivals—pantomime, dumb-show, Italian opera, and ballad opera. The growth of the novel is said to have lessened the taste for playgoing, especially among the thoughtful and respectable classes, to whom the licence of the stage had become repugnant. Finally, it is claimed that the increasing vogue of the player and the higher specialization of his art threw the play into the background, and caused it to deteriorate.

Some of these considerations it would seem difficult to establish : others are effects rather than causes. There were other forms of popular entertainment than drama during the Elizabethan period : yet it is not seriously claimed that Shakespeare's plays would have been better had there been no bear-gardens on the Bankside. Again, the respectable bourgeois might easily have gone to many mid-eighteenth-

Decline of  
English  
Drama.

Causes  
of the  
Decline.

century plays in England without danger of being shocked : many plays had, indeed, been written with express regard to his moral foibles, and he would doubtless have patronized these had he found them interesting. Nor again, is it easy to admit the contention that the play deteriorates as the actor's art advances :<sup>1</sup> it would be much more easy, and much more relevant to the dramatic conditions of the period, to show that where plays are already bad the player is sometimes thrown back on his own resources, with a possibility of gain for his art. The main causes of the drama's decline must be sought elsewhere.

Change in  
Stage  
Structure.

The Elizabethan stage had been a platform stage running out promontory-wise among the audience. Before the end of the sixteenth century, comparatively little use was made of scenery or properties ; and although shortly before the closing of the theatres provision had been made for changes of scene, even then the 'painted cloths' were mainly confined to the background, and can have made little impression upon the numerous spectators who perforce regarded the platform from the sides. Hence the place of action on the stage of Shakespeare and Jonson was indicated rather by symbol than by illusion : the spectators were expected to 'work, work, their thoughts'<sup>2</sup> in order to conjure up a given scene, instead of having its semblance more or less realistically set before their eyes. This deficiency in scenery, if it caused the audience a certain imaginative effort, also gave the author great freedom and opportunity. He could vary the scene as often and as abruptly as he liked : he was independent of the scene-painter ; indeed, to the great gain of our literature, he was forced to become his own scene-painter, and to use vivid descriptive poetry for the enlightenment of his audience. Owing to the very vagueness of his stage, he could choose and handle his themes according to the natural bent of his genius, and could write with large technique and free inspiration. The variety and might of Elizabethan drama are at least in some sense due to the structure of the Elizabethan stage.

The history of the theatre between the Restoration and our own day is that of the transformation of the platform-stage into a picture-stage, and the consequent substitution of illusion for symbol. This change, which had a profound effect on the form of English drama, was gradual, yet can be clearly

<sup>1</sup> It is difficult, too, to allow the claim that Garrick's art was more highly specialized than Betterton's, or that he engrossed more of the public attention. As against this, see Pepys's admiring references to Betterton's acting, and the detailed account given by Colley Cibber, in his autobiography, of Betterton and his twelve chief contemporaries. Cibber concludes : 'May we not venture to say that they had not their equals at any one time upon any theatre in Europe ? . . . No stage at any one period could show thirteen actors standing all in equal lights of excellence in their profession.'

<sup>2</sup> *Henry V*, Act III, Prologue, line 25.



traced through its various stages. Almost immediately after the Restoration the proscenium, which had already existed before the Commonwealth, was freely employed, and helped to sever the audience from the front of the stage. The back stage grew in size, and the curtain, which in the Elizabethan theatre had shut off only a small corridor or alcove, was now thrust further forward. The front stage was correspondingly decreased, and was eventually seen from the side by certain box-holders only, instead of, as in the Elizabethan play-house, by a great number of the spectators standing in the 'yard'. While these developments were occurring, the stage scenery was becoming more various and elaborate, and was employed on the front part of the stage and at its sides, no less than at its back. In 1762 spectators were excluded from the stage, and the auditorium was enlarged to receive the resulting overflow. In many theatres a few boxes remained behind the proscenium till the nineteenth century, but this did not effect the general change of structure. For the great majority of the spectators, the stage was no longer a reciting-platform jutting into their midst, and supported in certain cases by a meagre back scene: it had assumed the form of a picture, of which the proscenium was the frame—a picture from which they were excluded, and at which they gazed from without. The growing elaboration of scenery made it possible, and indeed necessary, to accompany the action of the play by an elaborate illusion of reality, instead of by its mere suggestion. In his conceptions of place and setting the playwright was limited to developments suitable to the scene-painter, who first became his rival, and then his master and tyrant, overwhelming his descriptive poetry with his own more showy and tawdry devices.

Although various kinds of romantic play still continued to hold the theatre, it was obvious that the new staging made rather for realism than for romance, for prose rather than for poetry, for quiet and life-like dialogue rather than for splendid declamation. For a considerable while many survivals of Elizabethan acting and setting continued to hold a stage to which they were no longer appropriate; and it is only in our own age that the actors have learnt, for the sake of increased realism, to abolish the aside, to restrict very rigorously the use of the soliloquy, and to act throughout as if unconscious of the spectators' presence. The modern picture stage is now regarded both by player, playwright, and spectator, as a room out of which one side has been knocked, and into which the audience are only allowed to peep by stealth. Obviously such a condition of things has favoured the realistic prose play, and has handicapped the romantic and poetic. In some countries it has been possible to overcome this handicap by the institution of theatres subsidized by the State, in which drama can be performed without regard to the box-office receipts, and the audience can be educated till it gets over the initial incongruity between the romantic play and the realistic stage. In

Effect of  
the New  
Staging.

continental countries possessing such theatres, the romantic drama still flourishes, and the tradition thus kept alive has affected and improved the repertory of privately-managed houses. But in England, where there is no national theatre, the private actor-manager is content to follow the line of least resistance, with the result that, for nearly two and a half centuries, little romantic drama of the first order has been written for the English stage, and none so written has held its place. This change in the structure of the stage, combined with the influence of the modern commercial actor-manager, must be held a main cause of the decay of English drama.

A second cause must be sought in the general attitude of the eighteenth century toward literature and life. The greatness of Elizabethan drama had been largely due to the freedom and variety in which the national spirit had found expression. The growing tendency toward order and restriction, though it was favourable to some kinds of literature, was certainly not so to romantic drama, whether tragedy or comedy. The quickened moral sense of the period, which gave a certain impetus both to the essay and to satire, appears less acceptably in the 'moralized dramas' of Cibber, and in the sentimentalized comedies of Steele, and provokes, by a natural and significant reaction, such licentious drama as that of Mrs. Centlivre (1680-1722). The prevailing classicism of the age takes dramatic shape in many adaptations from Corneille and Racine, and in a series of original plays ranging from Addison's *Cato* to Johnson's *Irene*. Toward the middle of the century, classical drama was given a fresh impetus through adaptations of Voltaire's plays, and the production of many plays written on the Voltairean model by Arthur Murphy and others. Yet the romantic element was kept alive in constant revivals of Shakespeare, and in such tragedies as *The Revenge* and *Busiris* of Edward Young (1681-1765), which show signs of Elizabethan influence. Romantic after a somewhat different fashion was the *Douglas* (1756) of John Home (1722-1808), a play very famous in its time, yet now little read, and chiefly familiar through the serio-comic suggestion of the quotation 'My name is Norval'. Some years later Hannah More attempted, in *Percy*, to fit the spirit of romantic tragedy to the fashionable taste for moral casuistry.

Different in spirit and technique, and embodying a conscious reaction against both the classical and the romantic play, are the domestic tragedies of George Lillo (1693-1739). *The London Merchant, or the History of George Barnwell* (1731), is written in prose, and is based upon an Elizabethan ballad narrating the fall of a prentice who had taken to evil courses. *The Fatal Curiosity* (1736), written in uninspired blank verse, follows the model of *Arden of Feversham* and *The Yorkshire Tragedy*, and tells the story of a Cornish murder case. Lillo also adapted Shakespeare, and attempted romantic tragedy; but his chief importance is due to the plays just named, which,

Classic  
and  
Romantic  
Plays.

Lillo and  
others.



though far from intrinsically great, had a notable effect on the development of eighteenth-century drama, mainly through their preoccupation with the sentimental and familiar. Sentimental drama had by this time firmly occupied the English stage, and had issued both in tragedy and in comedy. Later in the century it finds expression in the *False Delicacy* (1768) of Hugh Kelly, and, after a different fashion, in *The Brothers* (1769) and *The West Indian* (1771) of Richard Cumberland, who is the original of Sheridan's Sir Fretful Plagiary. In his mingling of the sentimental interest with the interest of adventure, and in his use of exaggerated effects, Cumberland anticipates the modern melodrama.

Though comedy reaches no very high level throughout the earlier part of the eighteenth century, on the whole it suffered less than tragedy from the effects just indicated. It was occasionally, indeed, stimulated by both the classical and the romantic tendencies of contemporary drama to a certain vigour of reaction, finding outlet in such free burlesques as Fielding's *Tom Thumb the Great* (1731) and Henry Carey's *Chrononhotonthologos* (1734). These plays proclaim their satiric intent by their respective sub-titles, *The Tragedy of Tragedies* and *The Most Tragical Tragedy ever Tragediz'd by any Company of Tragedians*. The sentimental pitfall is avoided in such spirited comedies as *The Fair Quaker of Deal*, by Charles Shadwell—a nephew of Dryden's 'Og'—and *The Suspicious Husband* (1747), by Joseph Hoadly, son of a famous ecclesiastic. Similar freedom and robustness characterize many plays by George Colman the elder (1732–1794), a prolific writer whose best work is to be found in *The Jealous Wife* (1761) and *The Clandestine Marriage* (1766), a comedy written in collaboration with David Garrick. Pantomime had early established itself upon the eighteenth-century stage: farce also was in continual favour, being regularly produced by Garrick during his managership of Drury Lane (1747–76), and receiving a racy topical turn from Samuel Foote<sup>1</sup> (1720–1777). The satirical and topical element was also strong in the ballad opera, which reached its triumph in Gay's *Beggar's Opera* (1728), and received a fresh lease of popularity in Isaac Bickerstaff's *Padlock* (1768).

It is significant of the national instinct in dramatic matters, that the two leading English playwrights of the eighteenth century achieved their triumphs through the more robust and elemental effects of comedy, rather than by recourse to the *comédie larmoyante*. Goldsmith's plays, and their relation to the spirit of their time, will be discussed separately. The first play of Sheridan (1751–1816), *The Rivals* (1775), depends in large measure for its success on its ingenious plot, which its author took over from tradition, and refashioned with fresh and brilliant skill. But the rollicking interest of situation is heightened by the sure and spirited drawing of the main

Comedy  
and Bur-  
lesque.

Sheridan  
—*The  
Rivals*.

<sup>1</sup> Author of *The Minor*, *The Mayor of Garratt*, *The Maid of Bath*.

characters, Sir Anthony Absolute, Mrs. Malaprop, Sir Lucius O'Trigger, and Bob Acres, all of whom rank among the great comic figures of our literature. The dialogue of this superb farce is quick and sparkling, and its structure and colouring are in nearly all ways admirable. A concession to the prevailing taste of the day is evident in the sentimental underplot between Falkland and Julia. *The Rivals*, though not written in the highest style of English comedy, nor of Sheridan, is a masterpiece in a delightful kind.

*The Duenna,*  
&c.

Sheridan's next play, *St. Patrick's Day* (1775), is a farce, hastily written and startlingly inferior to its predecessor. *The Duenna* contains flashes of wit,<sup>1</sup> but owes what interest it commands rather to its ingenious, if not wholly original, situations than to any particular brilliancy of dialogue or character drawing. In 1777 Sheridan produced *A Trip to Scarborough*, a skilful rehandling of Vanbrugh's *Relapse*; and in the same year appeared his greatest play, *The School for Scandal*, which has justly been described as the 'last great English comedy'. Though here, as generally, he drew upon conventional types, he has shaped these into such living and unforgettable figures as Charles Surface, fine-souled beneath his libertinism, Joseph Surface, the scoundrelly 'man of sentiment', and Lady Teazle, the flighty, wavering, and, in the end, repentant woman of fashion. In the main plot of the play Sheridan reaches his highest flight of comedy: more obvious humours are embodied in the 'grotesques', Sir Benjamin Backbite, Crabtree, Mrs. Candour, and the rest of the 'School', who by no means equal the 'grotesques' of *The Rivals*. The dialogue has not only wit, but the peculiar ease and fling distinctive of all Sheridan's best work. *The School for Scandal* has not quite the elemental quality of Molière's highest comedy, but it is a masterly portrayal of the manners of its time, and of the psychology of fashionable society in all times.

*The School for Scandal.*

*The Critic.*

In *The Critic* (1779), Sheridan has his merry fling at the dramatic affectations of his day. The first act introduces certain hangers-on of the stage, drawn with malicious and brilliant satire—the vicious criticaster Sneer, the stage-struck Dangle, Sir Fretful Plagiary, and Puff, that inimitably-drawn dramatic factotum. Puff is at once author and producer of the fantastic historic drama, *The Spanish Armada*, which supplies the roaring fun of the last two acts, and is the most brilliant dramatic caricature in the language. The loves of Whiskerandos and Tilburina are a joy for ever, and *The Critic*, though not the greatest, is surely the most laughable of Sheridan's plays.

Lesser  
Drama-  
tists.

The remaining dramatists of the period may be briefly

<sup>1</sup> As when Donna Louisa remarks to her lover, who has given up the Jewish religion for an estate, but has not yet become Christian, that he 'stands like a dead wall between Church and Synagogue, or like the blank leaves between the Old and New Testament'.



dismissed. Mrs. Hannah Cowley wrote a series of comedies—including *The Runaway* (1776) and *The Belle's Stratagem* (1780)—obsequiously adapted to the successive demands of popular taste. General Burgoyne, in *The Heiress* (1786), has left a comedy of higher, though not of the finest, quality. The drama of social purpose is represented by *The Road to Ruin* (1792) and *The Deserted Daughter* of Thomas Holcroft, and, to a certain extent, by the domestic comedies of Mrs. Inchbald. But by the end of the eighteenth century the stage drama, mainly for the causes above specified, had almost ceased to rank as one of the higher kinds of literature; and this estrangement remains all but absolute till the death of the nineteenth century and the birth of the Repertory Theatre and the modern literary play.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### THE AGE OF JOHNSON: PROSE

The Spirit of Augustan literature — Johnson, Boswell, Goldsmith, Burke, Hume, Gibbon, Junius, Chesterfield, Walpole — Minors.

THE period of Addison, Pope, and Swift, even more than most literary periods, had been affected by concomitant political and social conditions. The order and restraint which had been imposed after the Revolution on a country wellnigh distraught by civil war and Stuart misrule, had had its parallel in the literary reaction against the licence of the 'metaphysical' school and against the imaginative excesses which Dryden had not hesitated to attribute even to Shakespeare. The particular form of the heroic couplet which reached its perfection in Pope was an admirable antidote to the metrical laxity which had been growing in blank verse from the day of Fletcher to that of Nicholas Rowe. The towering imagination of the Elizabethans had been 'trashed for overtopping', and their widely differing attempts, for the most part unconscious, to realize the Absolute and Unconditioned, had been replaced by a school of 'philosophical' poetry devoted to speculations mainly ethical, which was content, for the most part, to take God for granted, and was little concerned with any attempt, whether wistful or passionate, to bridge the gulf between Him and man. The 'metaphysical quiverings' which have been described by a great French critic as the chief glory of Romanticism, had died away with Donne, and were not to quicken into a fresh blaze till the day of Wordsworth's immediate forerunners.

The Spirit  
of  
Augustan  
Literature.

The age was, indeed, not one of imagination and idealism in the transcendental, yet possibly too exclusive sense, which our own age has attached to these terms, but one of sense and sanity, of breadth rather than of profundity, of virile and

sometimes pseudo-virile robustness, of distaste for the misty and the mystical, and of a tendency to regard Nature merely as a savage and unkempt condition which was slowly and beneficently being reformed into order by the civilizing hand of man. And in this process Man was a seeker, not for the infinity dear to the Romantic soul, but for finality; nature, society, and literature being conceived as kinds whose species he would one day exhaust and perfect, were his judgment but kept sufficiently true and his industry sufficiently unflagging and methodical.

Johnson. Unless these antecedent conditions are understood, it will be difficult to comprehend the genius of Samuel Johnson (1709–1784), in which the massive strength of the eighteenth century reaches its culmination. The last great interpreter of the Age of Sense, he became one of the earliest victims of the Age of Imagination. The reaction against him had begun well before the end of the eighteenth century—it is already evident in a youthful satire of Chatterton's; and it prejudiced his reputation as thinker and critic throughout a great part of the nineteenth century, despite the joy taken by almost all in the man Johnson as presented by the genius of Boswell. During the last twenty years Johnson has come back into his own, and perhaps even into a little more than his own, largely through the splendid advocacy of such writers as Sir Walter Raleigh and Mr. John Bailey. In our own eclectic generation, it would be almost as dangerous to disparage him as to disparage Blake. Our present interest in him begins after he had given up school-mastering at Market Bosworth, and had thrown himself on literature and London, bringing with him his friend and pupil, Garrick, and his cold tragedy, *Irene*. For several years poverty, journalism, and translation were his portion. His invention was quickened and his style strengthened by the largely imaginary Parliamentary Debates which he contributed to the *Gentleman's Magazine*. In 1738 he published *London*, a poem written in imitation of Juvenal, which attracted the notice and approval of Pope, and consequently of the town. In 1744 appeared his life of his friend, Richard Savage, that unhappy Bohemian and 'very incommodious inmate' of his friends' homes, 'the reigning error' of whose life was 'that he mistook the love for the practice of virtue, and was indeed not so much a good man as the friend of goodness'. In 1747 Johnson published his *Plan for a Dictionary of the English Language*: his completion of this great work occupied the greater part of the next eight years. Yet he found time to publish, in 1749, *The Vanity of Human Wishes*, another Juvenalian imitation, which is his finest thing in verse, and conveys with great power his grim and stoical reading of life. During two other years of this period, from 1750 to 1752, he turned his growing fame to account by publishing *The Rambler*, a bi-weekly 'newspaper essay' which owes its form—but as Johnson expressly warns us, not its general aim or spirit—to *The Spectator*. *The*

Early  
Verse and  
Prose.

*The  
Rambler.*



*Ramblers* are generally serious: sometimes they are portentously so. Johnson here frequently employs the lengthy antithetical period, massive with Latinisms, which is generally regarded as the main mark of his style. At its best this lends great dignity and power to the moralizations on life, and the precepts of literary criticism, which are the best part of *The Rambler*. Few magazines written for the general public have expressed so much wisdom in such memorable language. It has been said that Johnson, when writing of life, deals largely in commonplaces: yet his commonplaces are generally preferable to the paradoxes of men more brilliant and less great. Thus he writes, 'To neglect at any time preparation for death is to sleep on our post at a siege, but to omit it in old age is to sleep at an attack.' 'Sorrow is a kind of rust of the soul which every new idea contributes in its passage to scour away.' 'He (a certain sinner) considers himself as suspended over the abyss of eternal perdition only by the thread of life, which must soon part by its own weakness, and which the wing of every minute may divide.' Some of Johnson's *Ramblers* (e. g. No. 73) have a bitter and Swift-like quality. His attempts at Addisonian allegory (e. g. No. 91) are generally unsatisfactory, and so, for the most part, are his essays in the light character sketch which had been brought to such perfection in *The Spectator*. Yet occasionally he succeeds even there, and his letter from a virtuoso (No. 82) comes little short of Addison at his best. When *The Rambler* waxes dull—and, special pleading apart, it does this fairly often—the fault is generally of style rather than sentiment, and consists in the piling up of top-heavy periods. Yet considering the drawbacks under which it was written—drawbacks of which Johnson was acutely conscious<sup>1</sup>—its general excellence is remarkable.

In 1755 appeared the great *Dictionary*, and in 1758 Johnson produced a new paper, *The Idler*, which was written on the lines of *The Rambler*, and appeared weekly till 1760. In 1759, in the evenings of a single week, he wrote *Rasselas*, to pay the expenses of his mother's funeral. Nominally a novel, it is really an expression of his own grave views on life, and has indeed been entitled a prose *Vanity of Human Wishes*. In 1756 had appeared his *Proposals for an Edition of Shakespeare*; the edition itself, after many delays, was published in 1765. His notes to the various plays are written with a strong common-sense which sometimes rises to genius, and often, though not always, goes to the heart of Shakespeare's most difficult meanings. His *Preface* to this edition is one of the greatest

The  
*Diction-  
ary, Ras-  
selas, and  
Shake-  
speare.*

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Rambler* 208. 'He that condemns himself to compose on a stated day will often bring to his task an attention dissatisfied, a memory overwhelmed, an imagination embarrassed, a mind distracted with anxieties, a body languishing with disease: he will sometimes labour on a barren topic till it is too late to change it; and sometimes, in the ardour of invention, diffuse his thoughts into wild exuberance, which the pressing hour of publication cannot suffer judgment to examine or reduce.'

things in his own writings, and in Shakespearean criticism. Readers of our own day would unhesitatingly reject several of its conclusions—the view that ‘in Shakespeare’s tragic scenes there is always something wanting’, or that ‘his tragedy seems to be skill, his comedy to be instinct’: yet, on the whole, Shakespeare’s genius has seldom been interpreted with more sanity and light. Johnson steadily refuses to adopt the common contemporary practice of putting Shakespeare on trial before the ‘Unities’: he rebukes captious critics by showing that ‘there is always an appeal from criticism to nature’; and his sanity and sense kindle into enthusiasm when he remarks that Shakespeare ‘has perhaps excelled all but Homer in securing the first purpose of a writer, by exciting restless and unquenchable curiosity, and compelling him that reads his work to read it through’.

*Lives of  
the Poets.*

In 1775 Johnson published his *Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland*, a most readable record of his travels in Scotland with Boswell in 1773. To the last years of his life belong also several political pamphlets, including *The False Alarm*, and *Taxation No Tyranny*. But by far the greatest work of his later years was *The Lives of the Poets* (1781). When Johnson wrote these, he had no longer to face the menace of ‘toil, envy, want, the patron and the gaol’, which had put its mark on his earlier life and work. He had now won fame and prosperity, and could write freely and with ease, even as he talked. Here, as in his *Preface* to Shakespeare, there is much to which posterity demurs: the quite unworthy estimates, for instance, of Gray and Collins; the statements that in *Lycidas* ‘there is no nature, for there is no truth’, and that its form is that of ‘a pastoral, easy, vulgar, and therefore disgusting’; and many such *obiter dicta* as ‘the fabric of a sonnet, however adapted to the Italian language, has never succeeded in ours’. Yet if Johnson does *Lycidas* scant justice, he has made amends by the high and true praise he gives to *Paradise Lost*: ‘a poem which, considered with respect to design, may claim the first place, and with respect to performance the second, among the productions of human kind.’ The *Lives* of Dryden, Addison, and Pope, when every discount has been made, are masterly pieces of biography and criticism; and apart from more positive merits, their remarks on metre and the general problems of literature are invaluable to all students of eighteenth-century criticism. Of wider and more human appeal are the aphorisms scattered throughout the *Lives*, aphorisms which represent the mature wisdom of Johnson’s own life expressed pithily and with masterly ease and gusto. ‘Personal resentment,’ he tells us, ‘though no laudable motive to satire, can add great force to general principles.’ ‘It is pleasant to remark how soon Pope learnt the cant of an author, and began to treat critics with contempt, though he had yet suffered nothing from them.’ ‘Combinations of wickedness would overwhelm the world by the advantage which licentious



principles afford, did not those who have long practised perfidy grow faithless to each other.'

Much of Johnson's writing, and especially of his literary criticism, is the expression not only of the man but of his age. Its tendency, no less than his own, is reflected in his love of the couplet, his dislike of pastorals, pindarics, and 'metaphysical' conceits, his suspicion of blank verse, his preference of human to cosmic nature as the stuff of poetry, and his demand that descriptions of natural scenery shall not descend from the general to the particular. His views on these and similar topics have an interest which is far more than merely historical. \*Yet the value of Johnson as a critic, whether of literature or life, depends on his greatness as a man—on his broad sanity and penetrating strength of intellect, his scorn of all the shams of life and thought, his fortitude and uprightness of soul—on the qualities, in fine, which represent to all the Englishmen who have read him with delight and love, the most sterling, if not the most picturesque and imaginative, expression of their national spirit.

Johnson  
and his  
Age.

To very many English readers who are but little read in Johnson's writings, his mind and personality are alive through the craft of James Boswell (1740–1795). Modern criticism has done Boswell full justice, and has refuted Macaulay's wretched paradox that he was a fool who wrote a book of genius. It is now seen that if many things in his life were unwise, there were both wisdom and greatness in his love of Johnson, and in the book which he wrote in the strength of that love. Boswell's interest in the cause of Corsican liberty had found expression in the *Account of Corsica* which he published in 1768 ; but his fame depends not on this nor on his efforts in law and politics, but on his *Journey to the Hebrides* (1773) and *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791). Few books have enjoyed such popularity from the date of their publication onwards : the *Life* is one of the greatest biographies in all literature. Boswell's passionate devotion to Johnson gives his portraiture its peculiar intensity and vividness : yet Boswell was far too great an artist to use rhapsody, just as Johnson was far too great and human a man to need it. Boswell has drawn Johnson 'warts and all', realizing that idealism in biography may transcend reality, but must never ignore it. His narrative is at once a record of facts and the careful portrait of a soul. His genius lies not only in the love and conviction which he brings to his work, but in his superb sense of unity and balance and detail. After the Bible and Shakespeare, no book is dearer to Englishmen than Boswell's *Johnson*.

Boswell.

'Let not his frailties be remembered ; he was a very great man,' wrote Johnson after the death of Oliver Goldsmith (1728–1774). There were frailties in Goldsmith's writings as well as in his character ; but his greatness is past doubt, for he excelled in verse and drama, the essay and the novel.

Goldsmith.

Early  
Writings.

After a fleeting experience of several universities, certain vagabond travels on the Continent, and certain vain attempts to qualify for various professions, he became a hack writer in London, contributing to *The Monthly Review* and other magazines, and translating from the French. His first work of note was his *Enquiry into the Present State of Polite Learning in Europe* (1759), which compensates by its freshness and originality for its deficiencies in knowledge, perspective, and taste. Here he states his objections to blank verse, to the 'absurdities of Shakespeare' and to 'disgusting solemnity'; here, too, he defends the portrayal of low life in literature, and offers his reflections, the outcome of bitter experience, on the paucity of patrons and the hard lot of English writers. Better work came in the essays of the next few years, which he contributed to his own short-lived periodical *The Bee*, to Smollett's *British Magazine*, and to John Newbery's *Public Ledger*. Among the best of these contributions are the *City Night Piece*, with its pathetic reference to the outcast women of London; and the admirable *Reverie in the Boar's Head Tavern at East Cheap*, wherein the spirit of Mrs. Quickly appears to the essayist, and tells him 'in this room I have lived, child, woman, and ghost, these three hundred years'. In the *Ledger* originally appeared the *Chinese Letters*, republished in 1762, as *The Citizen of the World*. These follow the device, perfected by Montesquieu and others, of using the supposed comments of a visiting Oriental as a means of satirizing English society and politics. In point of grace and verisimilitude these papers are at a disadvantage with the famous *Lettres Persanes*, and their satire and philosophy occasionally miss fire. Yet the collection is lit with delightful humour, and Goldsmith's mastery of the character sketch is already evident in his portraits of the swaggering pauper, Beau Tibbs, of the 'Man in Black'—who is largely Goldsmith himself—and of the gormandizing parson, Marrowfat. Most of the letters are essays in effect, and many of them are essays in form. Throughout their pages Goldsmith displays his own views and preferences, including his admiration of the English monarchy and of Voltaire, and his dislike of critics, warfare, colonization, and Laurence Sterne, whom he accuses of 'bawdry and pertness'.

The  
Citizen  
of the  
World.

The Vicar  
of Wake-  
field.

Goldsmith's long practice of the character sketch helped greatly toward the success of his last important prose work, *The Vicar of Wakefield*, which was written during 1761-2, but not published till 1766. Its plot is conventional, and so is the character of its main villain, Squire Thornhill; but the family of Thornhill's intended victim, Olivia Primrose, are drawn with inimitable humour and delicacy, and the Vicar himself, with his learning, lovable, and simple piety, and deep-rooted aversion to 'deuterogamous' parsons, is one of the great characters of English fiction. Masterly, too, is the sketch of Moses, at once the *enfant terrible* and Simple Simon of the family, and the



easy prey of that Protean scoundrel, Ephraim Jenkinson. Certain of Goldsmith's own youthful experiences are preserved in the tale of George, the Vicar's eldest son. Few novels in the language are more thoroughly English in spirit than the *Vicar of Wakefield*.

Throughout his career Goldsmith wrote much miscellaneous prose, including a biography of Beau Nash, Histories of Rome and England, a *History of Animated Nature*, and many essays. A very great deal of this mass is mere hackwork, lit with gleams of genius.

His verse, which belongs chiefly to his middle and later years, is small in volume but various in kind, and, on the whole, of remarkably high quality. His longer and more serious poems, *The Traveller* and *The Deserted Village*, contain some fine descriptive passages, and at their best have peculiar sweetness and charm. *The Traveller* is the more reflective of the two; *The Deserted Village* contains the perfect portraits of the village parson

His  
Poems.

to all the country dear,  
And passing rich with forty pounds a year,  
and of the village schoolmaster who argues before the gazing  
rustics with ' words of learned length and thundering sound ',  
while

still the wonder grew  
That one small head could carry all he knew.

Goldsmith's ballad, *Edwin and Angelina*, has no very strong appeal to our own age. Of his shorter serious poems, the most famous is the lyric from *The Vicar of Wakefield*, ' When lovely woman stoops to folly '. His best things in lighter vein are the witty and skilful *Elegies on Mrs. Mary Blaize* and the *Mad Dog*; and two spirited pieces of occasional verse, *The Haunch of Venison* and *Retaliation*. This last poem was evoked by a famous sally of Garrick's, and chaffs most wittily many of Goldsmith's fellow-diners at ' The Club ', including Burke and Sir Joshua Reynolds.

Of Goldsmith's two completed plays, *The Good-Natured Man* (1768) is a very successful comedy which has for its central figure the childishly charitable and amiable Honeywood, and for its most memorable minor characters the lugubrious Croaker, and the vainglorious impostor, Lofty, to whose vagaries<sup>1</sup> the play owes much of its appeal. But Goldsmith's dramatic masterpiece is, of course, *She Stoops to Conquer*. Its central episode, the mistaking of Squire Hardecastle's house for

His Plays.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. the stroke by which Croaker is made to say to Olivia: ' Well, well, it's a good child, so say no more: but come with me and we shall see something that will give us a great deal of pleasure, I promise you; old Ruggins, the curry-comb-maker, lying in state: I am told he makes a very handsome corpse, and becomes his coffin prodigiously. He was an intimate friend of mine, and these are friendly things we ought to do for each other.'

an inn, is said to have been suggested by a youthful experience of Goldsmith's own. The plot is simple, but serves to supply a variety of adventures, and to elicit a variety of 'humours'. Mr. Hardcastle is almost as living and finished a figure as Parson Primrose, and hardly less finely drawn are the sprightly Miss Hardcastle and her lover, Marlow. In *Tony Lumpkin*, Goldsmith has left a character not unworthy to rank with Shakespeare's greatest comic figures. Tony's racy elemental humour is consummately blended with the high comedy of the piece, and the whole is suffused with Goldsmith's sweet and wholesome humanity. On this play, as on all Goldsmith's best work, is set the impress, not only of genius, but of a great and lovable nature.

Burke.

In Edmund Burke (1729-1797) we meet one of the most powerful thinkers of his age, and one of the great masters of English prose. His mind was as complex as it was profound, and this complexity has led, or misled, many into taxing him with inconsistency. In political theory he is rooted in the past, and takes his stand on the settlement of 1688; yet he has swayed the most forward political thought of modern England; and it is significant of his wide sweep that both conservative and liberal appeal to his authority with equal confidence. His Whiggism was regarded as unorthodox by most Whigs of his own day, whatever their shade of conviction; yet he claimed to the end to have been constant himself to that principle of party loyalty which he always preached fervently to others. He repeatedly expressed his dislike of philosophy, yet his whole life and thought were informed by a profound philosophic ideal. The best energies of his earlier manhood had helped to keep alive the light of liberty which he saw menaced with extinction in America, India, and Ireland; yet in his later years he strove with passionate earnestness to stifle with reaction that wilder blaze of her kindling which was the French Revolution. If, however, the later phases of his thought seem inconsistent with the earlier, the inconsistencies are secondary and superficial; in all essentials his mind was constant to the great convictions which had swayed it from the first. The change had been in the morals and manners of the age.

Early  
Writings.

His early work, the *Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1756), stands almost alone among his writings in having no political significance. Certain of its speculations concerning art are trite, and certain others are exaggerated and untrue, yet there is insight in his account of tragedy, and of the relation of the sublime to the terrible; and if his style here lacks the sweep which it was later to compass, it has a formal beauty of its own. In the same year appeared *A Vindication of Natural Society*, in which Burke borrows Bolingbroke's style, but ironically refutes certain of his main ideas. It has been contended that this experiment greatly affected the form of Burke's later prose; yet the swing and intensity which he was subsequently to



develop owe little to Bolingbroke's polished periods. Of greater importance than the *Inquiry* and the *Vindication* are the *Observations on the Present State of the Nation* (1769) and *Thoughts on the Present Discontents* (1770). The *Thoughts* is the first of Burke's really great political writings. In it he comments on the circumstances of the Middlesex election, and formulates, already with force and mastery, certain guiding principles of British political development, and of his own thought and life.

During the next few years Burke turned his best energies toward resisting the disastrous attempts of the British Government to tax the American Colonies. His wide reading in history, constitutional law, and political economy had been fortified by the practical experience of politics which he had gained as Member for Wendover, and through his successive secretaryships to Hamilton and Rockingham. The fruits of this training became evident in the two great speeches *On American Taxation* (1774) and *On Conciliation with America* (1775), which, with two addresses given at Bristol and his *Letter to the Sheriffs of Bristol*, form his main contribution toward the cause of American freedom. The speech on *Taxation* is the more fiery and spontaneous of the two, and contains some splendid flights of eloquence. After reviewing British policy in America, Burke appeals passionately, yet with clear and serried reasoning, for a liberal treatment of the colonists. His pleading is glowing and intense, and is lit up with vivid character sketches of Grenville, Chatham, and Townsend. The speech on *Conciliation* is at once more comprehensive and more closely knit than its predecessor, and for its consummate blending of thought and eloquence may justly claim to be the greatest of all Burke's orations. After reviewing the arguments for and against taxation exhaustively and with penetrating insight, Burke gives a masterly survey of the American character, and shows that coercion of such a nation is foredoomed to failure. Both of the American speeches abound in those sentiments, at once brilliant and profound, which leap out of the mass of Burke's thought, and are the pith and marrow of his genius. 'Interested timidity disgraces as much in the Cabinet as personal timidity does in the field. But timidity with regard to the well-being of our country is heroic virtue.' 'Oppose the ancient policy and practice of the Empire as a rampart against the speculations of innovators on both sides of the question, and you will stand on great, manly and sure ground.' 'An Englishman is the unfittest person on earth to argue another Englishman into slavery.' 'Magnanimity in politics is not seldom the truest wisdom ; and a great empire and little minds go ill together.'

In the American speeches Burke's eloquence had been winged by the greatness of his cause and of its underlying principle. Between 1780 and 1790 he puts his genius once more at the service of an oppressed race, with the result

His  
American  
Speeches.

His Indian  
Speeches.

apparent in his Indian orations. Chief among these are his speeches on Fox's *East India Bill* (1783) and *The Nabob of Arcot's Debts* (1785), and the series of indictments delivered at the opening and close of the trial of Warren Hastings. With the justice or injustice of his charges against Hastings we are not here concerned; but his Indian speeches, with their insistence on humanity and righteousness in the treatment of subject races, have profoundly affected our whole conception of Indian administration, and together with his American speeches, represent the highest principles of British colonial policy. The Indian speeches, if they are not the greatest, are the most fervent of all Burke's parliamentary deliverances, and their eager scorn is lightened and relieved by such magnificent descriptive passages as that portraying the invasion of the Carnatic by Hyder Ali.<sup>1</sup>

His  
Writings  
on the  
French  
Revolu-  
tion.

The third and last great issue which engrossed Burke's energies was the attitude of his country and the world toward the French Revolution. His conception of the State as a divine organism destined for orderly, natural, and gradual growth, had led him, when speaking of America, to praise the 'wise and salutary neglect' through which 'a generous nature has been suffered to take her own way to perfection'. The same principle which had led him to uphold with all his might the liberty of the colonists, now led him to resist with equal vehemence the licence of the Terror. This, in his opinion, threatened to destroy not only all existing political institutions, but the moral and religious order of the world. His fulminations against the Revolutionaries and their English sympathizers are conveyed, not in speeches, but in letters and pamphlets, both of which forms he had already employed to good purpose in his early manhood. His chief writings on this subject are his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), *Thoughts on French Affairs* (1791), *An Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs* (1791), and the *Letters on a Regicide Peace* (1797). Of these works the *Reflections* are the most weighty and interesting, the *Letters* the most violent and extreme. In the *Reflections* Burke's political philosophy is still expressed with trenchancy and force;<sup>2</sup> and there are passages of great eloquence, including the very famous one in praise of Marie Antoinette. Of the *Letters*, the most important is the third, with its comprehensive survey of contemporary European politics. In the last year of his life Burke wrote his *Letter to a Noble Lord*,

<sup>1</sup> *Speech on the Nabob of Arcot's Debts.*

<sup>2</sup> Cf. 'A spirit of innovation is generally the result of a selfish temper and confined views.' 'He who gave our nature to be perfected by our virtue, willed also the necessary means of its perfection. He willed therefore the State.' 'Our Church establishment is the first of our prejudices: not a prejudice destitute of reason, but involving in it profound and extensive wisdom.' 'A perfect democracy is the most shameless thing in the world. As it is the most shameless, it is also the most fearless.'



addressed to the Duke of Bedford, who with the Earl of Lauderdale had striven to deprive him of the pension granted him by Parliament. This document is an interesting apologia for its author's life and opinions, and is also, perhaps, the most concentrated expression of that devastating irony which was his favourite weapon of offence.

The greatness of Burke's style depends ultimately on The genius of Burke  
 profundity of thought kindled and sustained by intensity of of Burke  
 emotion. His expression, though it is far from being the purest in the language, is probably the most passionate. But his greatest speeches and writings depend on something more than either ratiocination or rhapsody. They are great also in structure, by dint of the architectonic faculty of which Burke was a supreme master. No Englishman has ever excelled him in the power of working toward a great climax through a series of vivid strokes or pictures. His art in this regard is so subtle and natural as almost to seem the result of accident; but close analysis of his great triumphs—for instance, the *Speech on Conciliation with America*—discloses the conscious and ordered purpose which has gone to make the miracle. It has been said of him that 'he winds into his subject like a serpent'. His imagery is lavish and various, but, in his best work, it is always subordinated to the cumulative effect of the whole. His wide reading of poetry, and keen delight in it, are evident in his constant use of literary quotation, reminiscence, and allusion. The length and pitch of his periods are varied freely, and with seeming inevitableness, to the changes of his thought and theme. His greatest work is always rhetorical, and that view of his genius seems correct which finds its highest manifestation, not in his letters and pamphlets, but in his speeches, and especially in his American speeches. His faculty of humour is uncertain, and the invective which wings some of his highest flights at times becomes raucous and disconcerting. Yet his best work has a richness and glow which seem only possible where thought and feeling are interpenetrated by a profound mystical conception. And in all his oratory and writing there is that comprehensiveness which made Johnson say of his conversation, 'his stream of mind is perpetual: take up whatever topic you please, he is ready to meet you'.

Passing from oratory to history and philosophy, we find Hume.  
 a master of both kinds in David Hume (1711-1776). His philosophic work,<sup>1</sup> the greater part of which was written before he was forty, is strongly sceptical. He followed Locke in endeavouring to introduce 'the experimental method of reasoning into moral subjects', and as a result of this attempt strove to reduce all reason to 'experience'. Experience gave no evidence of a soul or ego; it reduced causality to mere sequence, and it substituted sympathy or fellow-feeling for

<sup>1</sup> *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739), *Essays Moral and Political* (1741-1748), *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748), *An Enquiry into the Principles of Morals* (1751).

reason as the basis of morality. The scepticism, and the weakness, of Hume's position were due to his omission of the intellectual element presupposed in experience. But he restated the fundamental problems of philosophy in prose of admirable dignity and clearness, and greatly influenced succeeding philosophic speculation. English philosophic empiricism derives from him, and he occasioned, by reaction, much of the profoundest German idealistic speculation. Outside philosophy, his greatest work is his *History of England* (1754-61). He began this with the reign of James I, and worked backwards from that date to the origins, and forward to the Revolution. He had always had the deepest antipathy for the Whig Party, and for the English, whom he believed to have leagued together to destroy everything Scottish. This prejudice defaces his *History*, especially the earlier part of it, which he rewrote with the view of removing from it any 'villainous seditious Whig strokes', and 'plaguy prejudices of Whiggism' which it might contain. Despite this drawback, Hume's history is important, through its comprehensiveness, its grasp of social problems, and its powerful, polished, and frequently satirical style. He was certainly one of the most powerful intellects of the eighteenth century.

Robertson.

A more fair-minded, though less great, historian was Hume's friend, William Robertson (1721-1793), who published his *History of Scotland* in 1758-9, and his masterpiece, the *History of the Reign of Charles V*, in 1769. Horace Walpole declared the first of these works to be the 'best modern history', and, perhaps with greater reason, congratulated the author on the purity of his English. From a strictly historical point of view, both of these books are now antiquated; but Robertson's shrewdness and depth of judgment, no less than his undoubted gift of style, make him a notable figure in literary history.

Gibbon.

A greater historian than either of these, the greatest, indeed, in the language, was Edward Gibbon (1737-1794). His monumental work, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, was projected in 1764, but the first volume was not published till 1776, and it was only in 1788 that the three last volumes were sent to press. The *History* covers the centuries between the period of the Antonines (the 2nd century B. C.), and the fall of Constantinople to the Turks in A. D. 1453. Gibbon's outstanding merits as a historian are his prodigious industry in the preparation of his material; his power of fashioning that material into lucid and harmonious narrative, informed by a great central idea; and his style, weighty, antithetical, and of gorgeous colour, especially admirable for description, but passing easily into reflection, and into a weighty and terribly effective form of satire. This last quality—the 'solemn sneer' noted in him by Byron—is prominent in the attack on Christianity embodied in the famous conclusion to his first volume. Gibbon's style, at once strongly personal and strongly coloured by his age, is one of the greatest, though



not one of the purest, in the English tongue. Of his supremacy as a historian, we may allow his fellow-historian, Mr. Freeman, to speak: 'That Gibbon should ever be displaced seems impossible. That wonderful man monopolized, so to speak, the historical genius and the historical learning of a whole generation, and left little, indeed, of either for his contemporaries. He remains the one historian of the eighteenth century whom modern research has neither set aside nor threatened to set aside. We may correct and improve from the stores which have been opened since Gibbon's time. We may write again large parts of his story from other and oftentimes more wholesome points of view; but the work of Gibbon as a whole, as the encyclopaedic history of 1,300 years, as the grandest of historical designs, carried out alike with wonderful power and accuracy, must ever keep its place. Whatever else is read, Gibbon must be read too.'

Of lesser importance than his history, but of perennial fascination, is Gibbon's posthumously published *Autobiography*.

The true greatness of Adam Smith (1723-1790) lies in other fields than the literary, but he merits mention here owing to the admirably clear and forcible style of his two chief works, *A Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) and *An Enquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776). The profound effect which this last volume has had upon our national life is not matter for our present inquiry. If a writer's greatness could be gauged solely by the effect he has exercised on his contemporaries, William Godwin (1756-1836) would certainly rank very high among the writers of the period. His novels are mentioned elsewhere in this volume. In 1793 he published his most important work, *An Inquiry Concerning Political Justice*, which embodied many of the ideas implicit in the French Revolution, and added many of Godwin's own. He believed that all the ills of humanity, including sickness, social inequality, murder, and conjugal incompatibility, could be cured by an appeal to reason. As is noted elsewhere, Shelley, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Hazlitt, were all, in varying extent and for varying periods, influenced by Godwin. His style is lucid and flexible, but he has no humour and little passion. He wrote extensively in many literary kinds, publishing plays, histories and biographies which need not concern us here.

Many of the best letters of this period have been written by authors eminent in other kinds, and have been discussed in relation to their general work; but certain writers who survive solely or mainly by their correspondence may be considered separately here. The early letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, dealing with her courtship and her runaway match with Edward Wortley Montagu, throw a curious light on the position of women at this period. More interesting are those which describe her journey across Europe to Constantinople, and her sojourn in that city, where her husband had

Adam  
Smith and  
William  
Godwin.

Lady  
Mary  
Wortley  
Montagu.

been appointed ambassador. Some of the letters written thence contain admirable descriptions of her life and surroundings; others display her insatiable love of reading. Sometimes she writes to Pope, who subsequently became her implacable enemy. The best letters of her last years are written to her daughter, Lady Bute, and display a pleasing affection.

Chesterfield.

A different picture of the time may be found in the letters of Philip Dormer Stanhope, fourth Earl of Chesterfield. The first series of these were written to his natural son, Philip Stanhope, the second to his godson, who bore the same name. Chesterfield has suffered with posterity for two reasons: Johnson, whom he slighted on a famous occasion, has described the letters in a phrase which is as famous as it is unjust; and Dickens, by caricaturing him as Sir John Chester in *Barnaby Rudge*, has certainly given an unfair impression of his personal character.<sup>1</sup> The letters are, indeed, of the world, worldly, but they contain much advice which is both prudent and moral; and if in certain essentials their teaching seems lax and cynical, we must make great allowance for the spirit of the time. It is only fair to Chesterfield, moreover, to remember that the letters were never intended for publication. In style they possess the classic qualities of elegance, wit, and charm.

Horace Walpole.

If Chesterfield was an artist in letter-writing, Horace Walpole (1717-1797) was both artist and genius. From early manhood onward he loved writing to his friends, and three thousand and sixty-one of his letters have been preserved in Mrs. Toynbee's edition. His correspondents include some of the most brilliant personalities of the day. Chief among them were Thomas Gray, Richard West, Sir Horace Mann, Henry Conway, George Selwyn, George Montagu, and the Countess of Upper Ossory. In his early manhood he had taken an active part in politics, and, to the end, his letters display his interest in European affairs. Thus we find him commenting on Fontenoy, Minden, Ticonderoga, the execution of the Jacobite rebels, and, towards the end of his life, on the French Revolution and the disappointment it had caused his hopes. At other times he writes of books, or of his recurrent ill-health, or of the fresh treasures which he had added to his beautiful pleasure-house at Strawberry Hill; or he dispatches from his town house in Arlington Street the bon-mots and scandal of London society, often with malicious additions and comments. Walpole's epistolary style is intimate and playful, and there is a pleasant, familiar homage in his letters to women. Beneath his foppish attitude toward life there were undoubted qualities both of heart and judgment. If to be supremely readable is a sign of genius, we must accord him the quality.

<sup>1</sup> For fairer estimates of him as man and writer, see the Preface to the Earl of Carnarvon's edition of his letters to his godson, and Mr. H. B. Wheatley's chapter on him in vol. x of the *Cambridge History of English Literature*.



Walpole's letters were written to his private friends ; but the *Letters of Junius* were intended for publication, and appeared in the *Public Advertiser* during a period extending from January 21, 1769, to January 21, 1772. Their authorship is still uncertain, but has been attributed at different times to over forty people, including Burke, Chatham, Chesterfield, Grattan, and Horace Walpole. It seems likely, on the evidence, that they were written by Sir Philip Francis, a civil servant who became notorious as the opponent of Warren Hastings, and subsequently sat in the House of Commons in the Whig interest. They were intended to bring about the fall of the Duke of Grafton's Ministry, and contain venomous attacks on him, the Duke of Bedford, Lord Mansfield, and others. The best modern criticism would not attribute to the *Letters* the importance attached to them by Burke and Johnson. Junius had evidently studied Bolingbroke carefully, and his style also shows the influence of Tacitus ; yet beside Burke he is a journalist, and what seems his strength is too often mere violence.

## CHAPTER XXV

### THE POETS FROM THOMSON TO BLAKE

Form and spirit of eighteenth-century poetry — Thomson, Shenstone, and minors — New forces — Gray, Collins, Cowper — The revival of romance — Ossian, Percy — Scottish Poetry : Ramsay, Fergusson, Burns — Crabbe, Blake.

THE spirit of the eighteenth century, as we have defined it, had been particularly favourable to certain kinds of literature, to the society verse, for instance, employed after such different and inimitable fashions by Prior, Gay, and by Pope in *The Rape of the Lock*, and to that fierce guardian of refined and sensitive civilization, satire, which in the prose of Jonathan Swift had achieved an almost lyric fervour and intensity. In poetry, whether philosophic, satirical or playful, an elegant simplicity and colloquial ease of diction had almost come to be regarded as the supreme literary quality, so that, for all their fundamental differences, there are strange and startling points of contact between the respective theories of poetry formulated by Pope and by Wordsworth.

Convenient as is the distinction between classicism and romanticism, much harm has been done by sweeping and exclusive use of the terms, and we might point to many passages of Parnell and of Pope himself as being 'romantic' in the full modern sense. And though the so-called 'movement' only attained full strength and consciousness with the birth of the nineteenth century, it was already alive in the germ, and in something more than the germ, by the middle of the eighteenth century. The literary quality, indeed, generally

Eigh-  
teenth-  
century  
Poetry.

attached to the term 'eighteenth century', would more fitly apply to the first half only of that century, and to the latter half of the seventeenth.

The acute sensitiveness, for instance, to natural beauty, which is a main mark of English romanticism, is already visible in the *Hermit* and *The Night Piece on Death* of Thomas Parnell (1679-1718), and is still more marked in *The Seasons* (1726-30) of James Thomson (1700-1748). This poem, like Young's *Night Thoughts*, deserts the couplet for blank verse, and thus metrically prepares the way for Cowper and Wordsworth. Its sincere love of nature is sometimes, though by no means always, marred by the conventional diction of the age, and the poem is of greater importance in the history of poetry than as poetry itself. Yet there is much in it which gives permanent delight, and if Thomson did not anticipate Wordsworth as an interpreter of Nature, he certainly did anticipate his precept that the first step towards such interpretation was close and loving observation. It has been said of him that he is over-fond of those generalized descriptions which were common in his age; but in point of fact, one of his chief faults is a tendency to catalogue Nature's charms, to portray her photographically and without transfiguring vision. Such a tendency is evident in his descriptions of the flowers of Spring, and of haymaking in Autumn; but there are real power and spirit in many of his descriptions, as in that of the thunderstorm in *Summer*, and of the interior of earth in *Autumn*. More than once he apostrophizes Nature, and he frequently appeals to the Power which created her. His pantheism sometimes has a Wordsworthian air, but in reality it is vague and conventional, and possesses no intensity of revelation. The greatness of *The Seasons*—for great the poem undoubtedly is—depends on Thomson's keen delight in the external shows of Nature, and in his frequently admirable handling of blank verse. These excellences are all the more praiseworthy in that they had little warrant from the fashion of the age.

In *The Castle of Indolence* (1748) Thomson, as if by an unconscious impulse towards Romanticism, again deserts the couplet, this time using the Spenserian stanza, and thus foreshadowing Keats, Shelley, and Byron. His stanza has almost always the ease and flow which are at once essential to this form, and infrequent with its minor practitioners; but this metrical facility is often compassed only by the forcing of words into strange senses and contexts, and Thomson's archaisms, unlike Spenser's, seem unsuccessfully blended with the fabric of the poem. The allegory is somewhat thin and unconvincing; the slothful and pleasure-loving poet could hardly have hailed with sincerity the victory won by the Knight of Arts and Industry over the enchanter Indolence, but in many passages of the poem there are delightful fancy and charm. Thomson is seen at his best in the description

James  
Thomson  
—*The  
Seasons.*

*The  
Castle of  
Indolence.*



of the Castle, with its porter and his page, and in the gently satirical portraits of his own friends and fellow-poets. Besides these two works, which contain the best of his genius, Thomson has also left an inferior long poem, *Liberty* (1734-6), a good deal of minor verse, five mediocre tragedies, of which *Sophonisba* is the first and chief, and *The Masque of Alfred*, written in collaboration with David Mallet.<sup>1</sup> His influence upon his contemporaries and successors was considerable; it is evident not only in such minor work as the *Epistle to Mr. Thomson*, and *The Chace*, of William Somerville (1675-1742), but throughout the poetry of Gray and Collins.

The Spenserian stanza was used to lighter and more homely purpose in *The Schoolmistress* of William Shenstone (1714-1763). It is significant of Shenstone's bent that he was drawn to Spenser owing to 'a peculiar tenderness of sentiment remarkable throughout his works'. Such tenderness, sometimes artificial and attenuated, not infrequently real and charming, is to be found in his own elegies, odes, and songs. The curiosities of subject and form so frequent in his work are due, partly to the conventions of his age, partly to his incurable lack of humour.<sup>2</sup> Yet his expression at its best often anticipates Gray, and there is a certain foreshadowing of Cowper in his sensitiveness of feeling and expression.

Certain lesser poetry of the period may here be discussed and dismissed. John Byrom (1692-1763), physician, Fellow of Trinity, Cambridge, and inventor of an improved system of shorthand, has a certain importance, both as diarist and poet. Richard Savage (1697-1743) has obtained, in Johnson's great *Life* of him, an immortality unwarranted by his own poems, chief of which are *The Bastard* (1728) and *The Wanderer* (1729). *The Bastard* has at least an autobiographical interest, and puts forward its author's claims upon the lady he declared to be his mother. John Dyer (1700?-1758) wrote two long and unimportant poems, *The Fleece* and *The Ruins of Rome*, and a shorter and quite important one, *Grongar Hill*, which is still read for its descriptions of Nature, and had earlier won the approval of Johnson, a critic not usually indulgent to the 'paysagiste'. Robert Blair (1699-1746) published in 1743

Shenstone.

Lesser Poets.

<sup>1</sup> *The Masque of Alfred* contains *Rule, Britannia*. Mallet, whose original name was Malloch, has left several plays and much miscellaneous prose and verse.

<sup>2</sup> Thus in his 22nd Elegy the ghost of the maiden Silvia appears to him, and expresses her fear that her body may be dug up and sold to the anatomists for dissection. If science must anatomize, she implores that it will content itself with the 'breathless corpses' of 'guilty convicts'. In the 18th Elegy a 'discerning shepherd' laments with perfect seriousness 'the state of the woollen manufactory in England', and complains that Phillis appears to him clad in 'the Gallic loom's extraneous twine'; and in *The Schoolmistress*, in a passage on flowers charming enough to be set beside Bridges' *Garden in September*, we suddenly light on a reference to the 'pun-provoking thyme'.

*The Grave*, a poem on the subject of death, written with a certain rhetorical power, and containing a well-known declamation on suicide. *The Spleen*, by Matthew Green (1696-1737), is a lively satire in octosyllables in which its author develops his cynical and easy-going view of life. *The Art of Preserving Health*, by John Armstrong (1709-1779), was considered respectable in its time, but yields little more of poetry than is promised by its title. The title of *The Pleasures of the Imagination*, the chief work of Mark Akenside (1721-1770), contains more imagination than would be recognized in the poem itself by any disciple of Coleridge; but Akenside's political satire, the *Epistle to Curio*, is lively and readable. The one important poem of the unfortunate Christopher Smart (1722-1771) is *The Song to David*, written in *rime couée*, and owing much of its fineness to its Biblical diction and imagery. Charles Churchill (1731-1764), friend of John Wilkes, and collaborator with him in *The North Briton*, is best remembered by his long poem, *The Rosciad*, which contains descriptions, mainly satirical, of leading contemporary actors; and by a fiercer piece of satire, *The Prophecy of Famine*, directed at Bute and his Scottish following. Richard Glover (1712-1785) is to-day better remembered by his spirited broadside ballad, *Admiral Hosier's Ghost*, than by his long and wearisome blank verse epics, *Leonidas* and *The Athenaid*. William Mason (1724-1797), the friend of Gray, wrote two inferior tragedies, *Elfrida* (1753) and *Caractacus* (1759), and a long and uninspired poem in blank verse entitled *The English Garden*. His *Isis*, a broken-backed satire upon Oxford, elicited a spirited poetic reply, *The Triumph of Isis*, from Thomas Warton (1728-1790), poet-laureate and author of a famous and admirable *History of English Poetry*. James Beattie (1735-1803), though gifted with small inspiration, attempted to use that great and difficult stanza, the Spenserian, in his least unimportant poem, *The Minstrel*. William Falconer (1732-1769) put his wide experience of the sea to useful account in his single poem of merit, *The Shipwreck*.

With William Collins (1721-1759) and Thomas Gray (1716-1771) we are already on the brink of the 'Romantic revival', and from the evolutionary point of view there are, perhaps, no more interesting names in our literature. Both were classicists in the sense that they reverted to the strict form of their Greek models, and endeavoured to revive the Pindaric Ode, which had been already handled in English after different fashions by Cowley and Dryden and Congreve; but both, even in their very choice, represent a reaction, in some sense Romantic, against the Augustan tradition of refined colloquial speech, expressing itself in the end-stopped rhyming couplet. The output of both men was small. Gray is best known by his famous *Elegy written in a Country Churchyard* (1750) and by a handful of serious Odes, the greatest of which are *The Bard* and *The Progress of Poesy*. He has also left some fine Latin

Gray and  
Collins.



poetry and some light verse, which varies in quality from the admirably playful *Ode on the Death of a Favourite Cat* and *The Candidate*, to that unlucky attempt at satire, *The Hymn to Ignorance*. Gray's letters, especially those written during his early travels on the Continent, are full of charm and scholarship, and illustrate his view of poetry, and also that growing sense of the romantic in nature which manifests itself diversely throughout this period. Gray was not only a fine classical scholar, but was one of the most widely-read men of his day; and his scholarship, like that of Collins, strongly affected the form and spirit of his poetry.

Gray, in *The Bard* and *The Progress of Poesy*, keeps a strictness of construction and expression which, architecturally speaking, set him higher than Collins; but in the younger poet's Odes on *The Passions*, and on the *Superstitions of the Scottish Highlands*, and in the beautiful unrhymed *Ode to Evening*, there are a fervour and an occasional wildness of emotion and expression which make him in a very special sense a forerunner of the great Romantic dawn. His love of Nature and constant recourse to her are main marks of the new tendency; and in him, as in Gray, the two great notes of human emotion and natural beauty, which had been sounded separately by Thomson, become fugally blended and interwoven. His interest in the supernatural and transcendental, which evoked the sarcasm of Johnson, puts him in touch with Coleridge and Shelley, and with the later Romantics generally. We may agree with Hazlitt and Swinburne that on the whole he was definitely a greater poetic force than Gray; but his inspiration is uncertain, and is constantly thwarted by the artificiality and conventionalism of his day. Gray, with less natural fire, had a far finer critical sense, and a far surer architectonic faculty.

After the pieces just mentioned, Collins's most notable Odes are those on *Pity*, *Fear*, *Simplicity*, *Mercy*, and *Liberty*. There is much beauty in his elegy on Thomson; two of his shorter poems, the *Dirge in Cymbeline* and *How Sleep the Brave*, are exquisite.

In Gray's *Elegy* appear clearly the classical elements of dignity, studied conciseness, the use of Latinized epithets, and of personification. It is instructive to contrast his use of the latter figure with that made by Wordsworth in *Yew Trees*. The newer impulse appears not only in the association, indicated in the opening passage, between Nature's moods and those of man, but in that vivid interest in lowly lives, studied not aloofly but in their inwardness, which was to develop in Cowper and culminate in Wordsworth.

From the comparative standpoint, it will be convenient to pass immediately to William Cowper (1731-1800). His early satires, including *Table Talk* and *Retirement* (1782), are written in the couplet, and it is not through them that he has held the favour of posterity. By far the most important of

Cowper.

*The Task.* his longer poems, historically and poetically, is *The Task* (1785), in which is implicit very much of Wordsworth, and, indeed, of the feeling and expression informing modern English poetry. Some distinctive marks of this poem, and of Cowper's poetry in general, as well as of the new spirit which was welling up in English life and literature, are quietism,<sup>1</sup> love of the country, a quite sincere detestation of large towns,<sup>2</sup> delight in the more quiet and everyday beauty of rustic landscape and life and of animal nature,<sup>3</sup> ardent love of liberty,<sup>4</sup> and hatred of oppression and cruelty, whether public or private, and whether inflicted upon man or beast.<sup>5</sup> This love in Cowper springs from the heart, and not from any cheap and cerebral cosmopolitanism or pacificism. He loved his country as Milton and Wordsworth loved her; he expresses his admiration of Chatham and Wolfe, and appeals to England in the name of 'soldiership and sense' to ensue efficiency, and not to give herself up to 'effeminates who philander when they should be fighting'. A further mark of Cowper's genius, as of the age which moulded Rousseau and was in turn re-moulded by him, was the frank and poignant self-revelation and self-commiseration which expresses itself throughout all his work—notably in his last poem, *The Castaway*, and in the famous passage of *The Task* beginning

I was a stricken deer that left the herd.

The gloom, deepening into insanity, which darkened so much of his life, passes constantly into his poetry, and gives him certain affinities with Leopardi and Vigny. The tender and intimate side of his genius reaches serious expression in the beautiful stanzas to Mary Unwin and the lines *On the Receipt of My Mother's Picture out of Norfolk*, and finds lighter utterance in a succession of poems compact of humour and sentiment,<sup>6</sup> which display their author as one of the great masters of the higher kind of occasional verse. In point of humour pure and simple, Cowper's genius finds unique expression in *John Gilpin* (1785).

The Re-  
vival of  
Romance  
—Ossian  
and  
Percy.

If Cowper's poetry already shows many tokens of the new spirit we must look elsewhere for one of the most important of these—the reversion to the poetry and romance of Britain's past, and the attempt to bring back something of their wildness and variety into the age of reason and law. This impulse had already appeared in the interest taken in old Scandinavian literature by writers like Hickee<sup>7</sup> and Gray; it is continued

<sup>1</sup> *Retirement*, 1-146 and *passim*.

<sup>2</sup> *Task*, i. 678-749.

<sup>3</sup> *Task*, i. 350-66; v. 1-125.

<sup>4</sup> *Task*, v. 293-346.

<sup>5</sup> *Task*, ii. 1-53; v. 137-289, 363 seq.; and *The Negro's Complaint*, *Pity for Poor Africans*, *The Morning Dream*, *On a Spaniel called Beau*, *The Cockfighter's Garland*.

<sup>6</sup> e.g. *Epitaph on a Hare*, *On the Death of Mrs. Throckmorton's Bullfinch*, &c., &c.

<sup>7</sup> Compiler of the highly important *Thesaurus Linguarum Veterum Septentrionalium*.



in Macpherson's paraphrase, or forgery of Ossian (1763), in the form of a reversion to the wild Celtic intuition of nature and love and war; and it recurs under a fresh manifestation in that renewed interest in old English balladry, domestic, martial, supernatural, and satirical, which attracted a host of editors and adapters during the eighteenth century, and culminated in *Percy's Reliques* (1765), passing onwards and determining in various degrees and fashions the trend of Coleridge, Scott and much modern poetry, and receiving a fresh lease in the great collection of Francis James Child.

A kindred impulse towards the past is visible in the poetry of Thomas Chatterton (1752-1770), who pretended to have discovered at Bristol the black-letter poems of a fifteenth-century monk named Rowley, a fictitious person whom he used as the mouthpiece for his own poetry. This was written in an imitation of Middle English which to-day could not deceive the veriest beginner.<sup>1</sup> It varies greatly in value, but the recurrence to older metres, and the invention of new ones, as well as the exultant battle-pieces, the strong joy in natural beauty, and the high imagination breaking forth imperiously into its own forms of expression, are all tokens of revolt against the rule of Johnson, whom Chatterton had already attacked vigorously in one of his earlier satires. Outside the Rowley poems, little of Chatterton's verse possesses much merit, but his production, if often immature, is astonishing work for a boy who was to kill himself at eighteen.

In Robert Burns (1759-1796) we encounter a greater than Chatterton, and a fresh expression of the new spirit; but before considering his poetry, we must discuss that of certain poets who preceded and strongly influenced him. Toward the beginning of the eighteenth century, the darkness which had lain upon Scottish poetry for nearly a century and a half began to be broken, though perhaps not after a very startling fashion. The earliest verse of Allan Ramsay (1686-1758) was written in the six-lined rhyming stave—*rime couée*—which had already been used effectively by Robert Sempill and Hamilton of Gilbertfield. Throughout his life Ramsay practised both satire and lyric; but his most noteworthy work is his *Gentle Shepherd* (1725), a pastoral drama in five acts describing with smooth grace the fortunes of a quartette of pastoral lovers. Here occurs by far the best lyric Ramsay ever wrote, 'My Peggy is a young thing'. He did much to increase the love of poetry among the Scottish people through his two collections of ancient and modern Scottish verse, *The Tea-Table Miscellany* (1724-32) and *The Ever Green* (1724). *The Miscellany* contains much work by Ramsay's contemporaries, and some of this is notable. Thus Robert Crawford contributed the

Chatterton.

Scottish Poetry—Ramsay and Ferguson.

<sup>1</sup> The influence of mediæval models on Chatterton was only superficial; it has been pointed out that his real master in poetry was Edmund Spenser (see W. P. Ker, *Cambridge History of English Literature*, vol. x, p. 235).

famous *Bush aboon Traquair*, and the less famous, but more exquisite, *Down the burn, Davie, love*. The contribution of William Hamilton of Bangour was *The Braes of Yarrow*. The ballad *Hardyknute*, included in *The Ever Green*, was for some time believed to be a very old poem, commemorating the battle of Largs; but it is now known to be the work of Lady Wardlaw. Another contemporary poet, Alexander Ross, has left several spirited songs, and a dull pastoral, *Helenore, or the Fortunate Shepherdess*. Lady Anne Lindsay is chiefly famous as the author of *Auld Robin Gray*. Many Scottish popular songs, old and new, are preserved in another collection made by David Herd; a later collection (1819-21), that of James Hogg, is confined to Jacobite songs, only a few of which reach the level of poetry. Slightly later than the poets just mentioned come Michael Bruce (1746-1767), John Logan (1748-1788), and Robert Fergusson (1750-1774). The most considerable of these is Fergusson, whose love of Nature appears in his odes *To the Bee* and *The Gowdspink*, and whose vividly humorous descriptive power is evident in such realistic poems of Scottish life as *Leith Races*, *The Farmer's Ingle*, and *The Sitting of the Session*.

Burns.

Robert Burns, though he read English poetry keenly, was not profoundly affected by his chief English contemporaries; indeed, the poets to whom he reverts most constantly are those of an earlier generation. Pope, Thomson, and Shenstone have all set their marks on his inferior and more derivative verse. His reading of Scottish poetry was enthusiastic but partial. He had a nodding acquaintance with such older masters as Gavin Douglas and Lyndsay; his preferences among later men are indicated by his lines,

O for a spunk of Allan's glee  
Or Fergusson's, the bauld and slee.

His own poetry owes much to both these writers; and it is also influenced by such miscellaneous verse as he had met in various collections of Scottish poetry. The vigour and directness of his genius are part of the spirit of the North; but his affinities with the poets of the South, and with the new beauty which was unfolding from their various striving, are strong and definite, if largely unconscious. He is akin to Crabbe through his sharp sense of country life and character, to Cowper through his love of animals and his hatred of injustice and oppression, and to Wordsworth through his love of Nature and his delight in simple and independent souls. His sense of natural beauty, though less profound and mystical than Wordsworth's, is equally vivid and intense. But when all analogies have been drawn, and all influences indicated, Burns, whether in satire or in song, remains individual and aloof even beyond the wont of great poets.

Several of his most representative poems were contained in the three volumes which he published in 1786, 1787, and 1793. Many of his best songs were contributed to two collections, the



*Scots Musical Museum* of James Johnson (1787–96), and the *Scottish Airs* of James Thomson. Though he had written fine poetry—including *The Death and Dying Words of Poor Mailie*—before his twenty-fifth year, his most fruitful period of production fell within the two or three years following his migration to Mossgiel (1784), and preceding his sojourn in Edinburgh. After 1787 he wrote some of his best songs, but nothing else of the first order save *Tam o' Shanter* and *Captain Matthew Henderson*.

Apart from his songs, his greatest work consists of descriptive, epistolary, or satirical poems written in the Scotch vernacular. Among his masterpieces in personal satire are *Holy Willie's Prayer* and *Death and Doctor Hornbook*. Both of these poems are written with astonishing vigour and gusto; the first is winged with that hatred of hypocrisy and religious cant which was almost an elemental passion with Burns, and reappears in *The Twa Herds* and *Holy Fair*, finding more general but not less bitter expression in the *Address to the Unco Guid*. More playful and railing is the famous *Address to the Deil*; and raillery is blended with affection in a number of poems addressed by Burns to his friends, including the *Epistles to John Lapraik, William Simpson, and John Rankine*. In many of these Burns rallies not only his friends, but himself; in certain other poems, as in *The Bard's Lament*, he falls to self-reproach or self-exculpation. In pure narrative his masterpieces are *Hallowe'en* and his two long poems, *The Jolly Beggars* and *Tam o' Shanter*. All three describe rustics at carouse or festival, and are full of speed, force, and humour. Many of his poems are lit with that joy in natural beauty which was ever keen and deep in his spirit. Though he often moralizes life, he seldom moralizes Nature. He never lays himself open to Swinburne's objection against Wordsworth, that 'he regarded her as a vegetable fit to shred into his pot and pare down like the outer leaves of a lettuce for didactic and culinary purposes'. Burns's poetry is the record of strong, and sometimes conflicting, emotions rather than the expression of a philosophy or faith; but in it some things are constant—his deep love of human worth, his hatred of pride and oppression, and his vindication of the rights, and even of the failings, of natural man against convention and hypocrisy. His natural sympathy with the humble or suffering appears in his poem *To a Mouse*, and is alloyed with the fashionable sensibility of his age in the lines *To a Mountain Daisy* and in *The Cotter's Saturday Night*.

Throughout his Scottish verse Burns uses three stanzas or staves in especial, all of which had been freely employed in preceding Scottish poetry. The first and most famous of these is the six-lined *rime couée*, which descends from a Provençal original and had been a favourite metre with Ramsay, Ferguson, and others. The second is that known as the *Christ's Kirk* stave—an octave with an added bob-wheel, or refrain. The

His  
Metres.

third is an octave with a subtly rhymed additional wheel of four lines.<sup>1</sup> These measures seem especially adapted not only to the spirit of Scottish poetry but to the force and intensity of Burns's own genius. Yet when he wrote in Scots he could handle other metres with mastery, as may be seen from his use of the octosyllabic couplet in *Tam o' Shanter*. When he writes in English inspiration constantly fails him, and he often lapses into imitation, even in cases where he has retained the Scottish metre.

His Songs.

According to one view, the greatness of Burns depends less on his songs than on his descriptive, narrative, and satirical poetry; yet he is certainly one of the greatest and most prolific song-writers the world has seen; nor is his greatness at all impaired by the fact that many of his finest things represent the working up, or working over, of older and cruder song. His notes and themes are various; he sings of love in *Ae fond Kiss* and *Of a' the Airts*, of patriotism in *Scots Wha Hae*, of friendship in *Auld Lang Syne*, of drink in *Willie Brewed*, of a lost cause in *It was a' for our richtfu' King*, and of human worth and independence in *For a' that*. Constantly in these lyrics his utterance has the supreme qualities of simplicity, intensity, and sweetness. This supremacy cannot be analysed; it can only be felt and demonstrated in such lines as:

My love is like a red red rose  
That's newly sprung in June,  
My love is like the melodie  
That's sweetly played in tune;

or

Had we never lov'd sae kindly,  
Had we never lov'd sae blindly,  
Never met, or never parted,  
We had ne'er been broken-hearted;

or

When day is gane, and night is come,  
And a' folk boune to sleep,  
I think on him that's far awa'  
The lee-lang night and weep,  
My dear,  
The lee-lang night and weep.

Crabbe.

Of widely different importance is the poetry of George Crabbe (1754-1832). His distinctive work is contained in the long poems descriptive of village life which range from *The Village* (1783), through *The Borough* and the *Tales*, to *Tales of the Hall* (1819). Crabbe's merciless portrayal of village types, through a realism generally bitter and frequently satirical, differentiates him sharply from Goldsmith (the

<sup>1</sup> Three poems written respectively in these staves are the *Address to the Deil*, *Holy Fair*, and the first *Epistle to Davie*. For a full account of Burns's principal metres, see vol. i of the edition of his works by Henley and Henderson.



unreal idealism of whose *Deserted Village* he expressly satirizes), and less sharply from Cowper and Wordsworth. Among his favourite characters are the worldly or the pedantic parson, the despised male or female dependant, young or old (a character who recurs again and again throughout his work), the mistress-keeping squire (who occurs hardly less frequently), the tyrannous or incompetent schoolmaster, the scheming or blackmailing confidant, the village wanton and her lovers, the embezzling clerk, followed up through his progress to perdition, the pauper with a past of sin or misfortune, and even the village murderer and infanticide. It will be seen that for the most part these characters differ greatly from Wordsworth's Michael, or Matthew, or the Leech-gatherer, or the men and women portrayed in the graveyard passages of *The Excursion*. Crabbe's intuition of human nature, if less profound and spiritual than Wordsworth's, is more sharp and clear and dramatic. Nor does he dwell exclusively on the dark side of village life; when he can find goodness and fortitude he takes them gratefully to himself, and brings them into bright relief against his black background. But he reverts to Johnson, and tacitly combats Cowper, by resolutely refusing to admit that, because the city may happen to spell sin, the country must necessarily spell perfect peace and innocence. His keen sense of the worth of lowly lives as dramatic and ethical material, puts him, though with the reservations just indicated, in affinity with Wordsworth.

His view of Nature, and of her relation to the moods and passions of mankind, is also Wordsworthian, though after an inverted fashion, for he is for the most part preoccupied with the sinister in her and its relation to the sinister in man. He handles his favourite rhyming couplet after a fashion which is occasionally weak and halting, more often forced and clumsy, but very often admirably racy and direct and strong.

No better instance could be offered of the width and scope of the new poetry and the new spiritual outlook than the fact that both Crabbe and Blake were, each in his own way, among their heralds. Hardly is there a greater contrast possible in poetry than that between the stern and acrid realist, and the seer vindicating, through ecstasy, the right of the individual soul to declare, in the most extreme terms of its own imagining, its communing with the universal spirit. The faculty of Reason, the sublimated common sense which to the eighteenth century had been the universal touchstone, was to Blake a cold and contemptible process, working through mere memory under the sway of the restrictive spirit Urizen, and utterly incomprehensive of those higher realities which could only be reached through inspired vision. The supreme importance of Blake in the progress of English poetry is his vindication of the right of the individual imagination to recreate all earth and heaven after the pattern of its own revelation. Just as Wordsworth's mystical intuition of Nature possesses certain affinities

with the Kantian philosophy, so does Blake, in his mystical revelation of the Universe and the human soul, start from a position having certain unconscious affinities with the subjective idealism of Fichte. In one sense he is the most extreme of the Romanticists, for it is to the individual soul, and to it alone, that he looks for the supreme revelation. He expressly rejects the Wordsworthian conception of Nature which had regarded her as the beneficent revealer to man of the Universal Spirit. This conception, through making Nature the bond between that Spirit and individual souls, had avoided mere subjectivity; but to Blake the soul was sovereign, and Nature, the outer show of things symbolized by him as Tirzah, obscured the Spirit no less often than she revealed it.<sup>1</sup> 'Nature has no supernatural', he says, 'and dissolves. Imagination is eternity.' Against a famous passage of Wordsworth's *Prelude* he wrote, 'Natural objects always did and now do weaken, deaden, and obliterate imagination in me. Wordsworth must know that what he writes valuable is not to be found in Nature.'<sup>2</sup> This criticism, be it noted, was written towards the end of Blake's life, when his reaction against 'vegetable nature' was becoming more and more marked. In other periods and moods he had declared 'every minute particular' of Nature to be 'holy', and in *Songs of Innocence* had given supreme utterance to the mystical correspondence existing between natural objects, the human soul, and the divine principle.

Blake's theory of imagination, and his poetic practice, are to a very large degree bound up with the mystical and immensely complicated interpretation of the universe which he develops in *The Prophetic Books*. It is quite true that a great part of his poetry—and certainly the best part of it—possesses a meaning and a beauty absolutely independent of these elaborate rhapsodies; on the other hand, it is idle to dismiss them as 'a mere curiosity': they are inseparable from Blake's mind and genius, and without reference to them some of his most remarkable poems—for instance, *The Mental Traveller* and *The Crystal Cabinet*—remain almost wholly unintelligible. *The Prophetic Books* themselves, besides much that is involved and terribly obscure, contain passages of high beauty. The unearthly quality of Blake's most beautiful and characteristic poetry (e.g. *The Fly*, *The Tiger*, *The Clod and the Pebble*) has been repeatedly noticed; always in reading him

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *To Tirzah* in *Songs of Experience*.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. his conception of the Covering Cherub, but note carefully that with him the Cherub is by no means wholly malign or restrictive. 'The Covering Cherub is the masque of created form in which the uncreated spirit makes itself visible. . . . Blake praises or denounces this Covering Cherub according to whether he considers it a means whereby things, too far above us to be seen as they are, can be made visible in symbol and representative form, or as a Satanic hindrance keeping our eager wills away from the freedom and truth of the Divine world.'—Ellis and Yeats, *Works of William Blake*, vol. i, p. 288.



one must remember that throughout his life he believed himself to be visited by legions of spirits whom he actually beheld with the bodily eye. His best-known works are *Poetical Sketches*, *Songs of Innocence*, and *Songs of Experience*; but some of his greatest and most beautiful work was not published during his lifetime, and is contained in the two manuscripts known as the Rossetti and the Pickering. His *Poetical Sketches* show Blake to have been largely influenced in early youth by the Elizabethans (as in *My silks and fine array* and the *Mad Song*) and by the older English ballads (as in *Fair Elenor* and *Gwin, King of Norway*). Many lyrics, however, in this volume and in *Songs of Innocence* possess a certain magic simplicity which has never been achieved in English poetry before or since; and in the later volume Blake becomes for all time the poet of childhood. Yet it is to the *Songs of Experience*, and to his later poems in general, that we must look for his most distinctive, though not for his most popular work. That work owes its greatness to the inspired lyrical interpretation of inspired spiritual vision.<sup>1</sup>

## CHAPTER XXVI

### POETRY: THE AGE OF WORDSWORTH

The full tide of romanticism — Coleridge, Wordsworth, Southey, Scott, Byron, Shelley, Keats, Landor, Moore, Hood, Campbell, Rogers, Hogg, Cunningham.

THE poets discussed in the last chapter represent in different fashions a breaking away from the Augustan tradition of thought and expression. From the age of Dryden to that of Johnson, literature had been closely connected with the political life of the country, and with the intellectual and social activity of the metropolis. We have already demonstrated the effect of this connexion upon the poetry of the period, and have discussed the resulting elements of strength and weakness. When we pass to such poets as Cowper and Blake, we find that the bond has been severed. The first seeks refuge from the stir and argument of the great city in the calm pleasures of the country; the second finds his escape in the vision vouchsafed to his eyes and soul of another world at once more lovely and more terrible than the present. The love of

New  
Forces in  
Poetry.

<sup>1</sup> During the last two generations, a number of books have been published on Blake. The definitive text is that of Mr. John Sampson (Clarendon Press, 1905). The student's attention is also drawn to Swinburne's *William Blake*, to Arthur Symons' *William Blake*, to Gilchrist's *Life of Blake*, and to the edition by Messrs. Ellis and Yeats of Blake's collected works. The Essay prefixed to vol. ii is of special value in relation to the *Prophetic Books*.

Nature, which for a while had burnt very low in English poetry, revives in the *Elegy* of Gray and *The Task* of Cowper, and flames into fiercer energy in the songs of Burns and certain of the Odes of Collins. In the *Elegy*, too, we find that growing sense of the pathos and worth and beauty of humble human lives, which is also a symbol of the new spirit, and reappears with a difference in many pages of Cowper and Burns. Closely akin to this are the strong love of birds and animals, and the pity for their suffering, which are common to Cowper, Blake, and Burns. The casting back to the romantic past for inspiration, which is to become so strong in Coleridge and Scott, has already been anticipated in the Rowley poems of Chatterton and in Macpherson's *Ossian*. The spell of the supernatural, which was soon to inspire the greatest poem of Coleridge, had already touched Collins, and had swayed the whole life and outlook of Blake. All of these things represent an instinct—often an unconscious one—to escape from the conventional aspects of thought and experience to fresh vistas of revelation. Sometimes the search disclosed the wonder of simple things or of beings hitherto neglected or despised; sometimes it made intimate and near the glamour of the past, or the uncanny happenings of the present. But in all its various forms it represented a revolt against the tyranny of finite reason, and a desire that imagination should follow its own law, even were it to lose itself in lowliness or else 'dodge conception to the very bourne of heaven'. The vastly different interpretations of life and literature offered by the poets we have mentioned, show how strongly individual was the trend of the age, and how emphatic was its departure from the Augustan standard of 'correctness'. The same impulse toward freedom and individualism is evident in the prosody of the period, in the instinctive shrinking of many poets from the end-stopped couplet, and in their preference for a variety of less orthodox metres ranging from the Pindaric ode and the Spenserian stanza to blank verse and the ballad measure. On every hand the ground had been broken for such fresh achievement as was realized in the publication by Coleridge and Wordsworth of *Lyrical Ballads* (1797-8). This volume represents a direct and conscious break with the past, and has generally, and with justice, been regarded as the earliest realization of the new spirit in all its fullness. As Coleridge tells us, it was intended as 'a series of poems of two sorts: the one of common subjects such as will be found in every village, poetically treated; the other of subjects mainly "supernatural", but made real by the dramatic truth of such emotions, supposing them real.' To Wordsworth naturally fell the first part of this attempt, to Coleridge the second. How far each succeeded is a question closely related to the poetry of both, which we may discuss forthwith, beginning with that of Coleridge.

His chief contribution to the volume had been *The Ancient Mariner*, which contains nearly all that is best and most

*Lyrical  
Ballads.*

Coleridge  
—*The  
Ancient  
Mariner.*



characteristic in his genius, and has probably influenced modern English poetry more profoundly than has any other single poem. Employing the old ballad measure—the ‘fourteener’ resolved into its component eights and sixes—which is one of the greatest among English metres, Coleridge has adopted every possible device of stress and line variation which might give it flexibility and variety without impairing its force and directness. Here, as in *Kubla Khan* and *Christabel*, he has divined and employed consummately that licence which, though it is one of English poetry’s chief glories, had been flouted and lashed for a century and a half as an inexpressible vice. Nor does licence with Coleridge ever degenerate into lawlessness: to *The Ancient Mariner*, as to all his best poetry, will apply the claim which he has put forward in the Preface to *Christabel*: ‘Nevertheless this occasional variation in number of syllables is not introduced wantonly, or for the mere ends of convenience, but in correspondence with some transition in the nature of the imagery or passion.’ Coleridge had, in fact, deserted that code whose symbolic expression was the end-stopped couplet, for the higher law of our poetry whose service is perfect freedom. In subject and general design, *The Ancient Mariner* embodies more strongly perhaps than any English poem outside Coleridge, that Imagination which he, like Wordsworth, recognized as the supreme poetic quality, and which both strove with might and main to bring back into the language after its long banishment. A friend’s dream, a saint’s legend, a hint from Wordsworth based on a reading of Shelvocke’s voyages, these were all his materials, and with them he dealt after a fashion of which we can only say,

And I know not if, save in this, such gift be allowed to man,  
That out of three sounds he frame, not a fourth sound, but a star.

The story of the poem is known to all; as for its spirit, it should be noted that though the Ancient Mariner’s salvation is eventually achieved through his blessing the water-snakes, and thus putting himself in touch with Nature, the poet’s main object is not to draw a moral,<sup>1</sup> however beautiful and sublime, but to awaken delight and wonder through describing with strange realism the adventure of a human soul upon a wide, wide sea of miracle and terror. It is at once impossible and unnecessary to analyse here the consummate process by which this thing is done.

The first part of the unfinished *Christabel* was written during the same period as *The Ancient Mariner*, though it was not included in the *Lyrical Ballads*; it again shows Coleridge’s imagination working at its highest pitch. In it he once more achieves

<sup>1</sup> To Mrs. Barbauld, who had complained that *The Ancient Mariner* had no moral, Coleridge replied that ‘in my own judgement the poem had too much, and that the only, or chief, fault, if I might say so, was the obtrusion of the moral sentiment so openly on the reader as a principle or cause of action in a work of such pure imagination’.

the supremely difficult task of rendering the marvellous real and intimate through investing it with the vivid details of daily life and the rich and shifting colours of Nature. The tale is one of a serpent-woman whom the innocent maiden, Christabel, befriends, and brings to slumber by her side in her father's castle. Geraldine lays a spell on Christabel, and prepares to destroy her, but the hidden horror which mars her beauty, and is disclosed to Christabel, is only suggested to the reader, and this vagueness increases the mystery and glamour which brood over the whole poem. In the First Part occurs the famous symbol of

The one red leaf, the last of its clan,  
That dances as often as dance it can,  
Hanging so light, and hanging so high,  
On the topmost twig that looks up at the sky.

The Second Part, while preserving the sense of mystery, has a more realistic setting than the First, and portrays the wild countryside 'from Bratha Head to Wyndermere', near which it was written. The whole poem is richly romantic in the specific, as in the general, sense of the word, and its reversion to the age of chivalry is typical of the new spirit at work in English poetry. In his various and powerful handling of the mighty four-stressed metre<sup>1</sup> of his choice, Coleridge shows that he has once more intuitively divined and mastered the genius of English poetry; and the prosodical note with which he prefaces the poem, though it errs in describing his principle of variation as a new one, goes to the very heart of English metre, and certainly does not deserve the disparaging treatment recently accorded to it in certain quarters.

*Kubla  
Khan.*

Still more characteristic of the profound and subconscious depth from which all Coleridge's best poetry seems to have been flung up, is *Kubla Khan*, produced after a reading of *Purchas his Pilgrims*, during a deep slumber 'in which all the images rose up before him as *things* with a parallel production of the correspondent expressions, without any sensation or consciousness of effort'. The poem consists of less than seventy lines, yet in it are summed all Coleridge's greatest qualities—rich sensuousness of expression, vivid and unearthly imagery, form adapted to emotion with consummate beauty and variety, imagination projecting itself into the unknown, and returning to earth aglow and quivering with infinity.

His other  
Poems.

Besides the three great poems just mentioned, Coleridge wrote a considerable amount of verse, but only the merest handful of this is of the first order, and by far the greater part is uninspired save by a few stray gleams. Such gleams are evident in his *Religious Musings* and *The Destiny of Nations*, which preceded the *Lyrical Ballads*. In the fragmentary *Three Graves* Coleridge attempts to adapt to ordinary life the theme

<sup>1</sup> For a detailed account of this see Oliver Elton, *A Survey of English Literature, 1780-1830*, vol. i, pp. 112-13.



of a curse or spell laid upon the human soul, which in *The Ancient Mariner* he had developed with romantic wildness. In two beautiful poems, *Frost at Midnight* and *Lewti*, he approaches Wordsworth in the detection of mystical affinities between Nature and the human soul ; but in the powerful Ode *Dejection* (1802) he has moved from this position, and believes that the soul can find no revelation outside itself. Thus he writes :

O Lady, we receive but what we give,  
And in our life alone does Nature live ;

and

I may not hope from outward forms to win  
The passion and the life, whose fountains are within.

It is instructive to contrast the superbly sure language of his greatest Ode, *France*, with the rhetoric which almost baffles inspiration in its immediate predecessor, the *Ode to the Departing Year*.

In drama Coleridge's first work was his crude and hastily written contribution to *The Fall of Robespierre*, a play in which he collaborated with Southey and Lovell. His tragedy *Osorio* is still early work, but was subsequently revised and produced under the title of *Remorse* in 1813 at Drury Lane, where it had a successful run. It is melodramatic and faulty in construction, but contains fine poetry, as does its successor, the dramatic idyll, *Zapolya*. His Plays.

The influence of Coleridge on English poetry has been steady since his death, and was never more strong than it is to-day. Poems like Mr. G. K. Chesterton's *Ballad of the White Horse*, and Mr. Herbert Trench's *Apollo and the Seaman*, owe much of their form and expression to *The Ancient Mariner* ; and the successive books of *Georgian Poetry* (1911-19) show that the younger men are striving with might and main to recapture Coleridge's intimate strangeness, his magical word and vision. The miracle of his influence becomes all the greater when it is remembered that it is by three or four poems alone that he lives for the majority of men. His Influence.

The influence of William Wordsworth (1770-1850) is less formally obvious than that of Coleridge in its bearings upon modern poetry, but even more profound in point of thought and spirit. No true understanding of his poetry and teaching is possible without close study of his two longest poems, and especially of the one in which he gives the history, material and spiritual, of his earlier years. This work, *The Prelude*, was originally intended to be preparatory to a huge autobiographical and speculative poem in three books called *The Recluse*. This Wordsworth likened to a vast Gothic cathedral, of which the earlier poem was to be the antechapel. Of the main fabric we only possess entire the second part, *The Excursion*. The third part was never written ; the first book of the first part was not published till 1888, and is now generally known as *The Recluse*. Wordsworth.

Besides these magnificent portions of the greater whole, there also survive no small number of those shorter poems which were intended as the 'little cells, oratories and sepulchral recesses' of the main building. In these outer chapels many votaries of Wordsworth have been content to worship without ever penetrating into the inner sanctuary.

Nature  
and Man.

It is impossible here to discuss his boyhood save in the briefest outline.<sup>1</sup> The trend which his inspiration was subsequently to take had been moulded, so he tells us, by the twofold influence exerted on his boyish mind by Nature and by the strong and simple rustic types whom he had encountered while at school at Hawkshead. His teacher, William Taylor, whose personality suggested many traits of 'Matthew', had already, during Wordsworth's schooldays, stimulated his growing passion for natural beauty; and it was as a schoolboy, too, that he had learnt that love and admiration for the Cumbrian 'statesmen', the aristocracy of the English peasantry, which were afterwards to take form in some of his finest poetry. From the beginning it was through symbols offered by Nature, rather than through austere introspection, or the independent inner illumination known to Blake, that he had divined the spiritual dignity of his kind;<sup>2</sup> the sight of a Cumbrian shepherd, seen as a giant through the mist on the mountain side, or glorified by the deep radiance of the setting sun, had ennobled man outwardly before his sight, and had brought the poet, mystically but surely, to an unconscious love and reverence of human nature. It was the same with regard to external nature. From early boyhood he had known

the first virgin passion of a soul  
Communing with the glorious universe.

His soul lacked not 'Aeolian visitations'; he had felt 'gleams like the flashing of a shield'; while still a boy, as he rowed by stealth on Esthwaite in a purloined boat, the mountain that towered above the lake had made after him, 'as if with voluntary power instinct,' had overtaken him, and carried the meaning of Nature deep into his heart, so that for many days his brain

Worked with a dim and undetermined sense  
Of unknown modes of being.

The associations he had thus detected in boyhood between natural impressions and memories and the deeper moods of the human consciousness,<sup>3</sup> were afterwards to flash upon his mind with profound inner meaning. It was in boyhood, too, that he

<sup>1</sup> For a detailed study of it see *The Early Life of Wordsworth*, by Émile Legouis, an elaborate study and analysis of *The Prelude*.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Excursion*, vi. 179 seq. *Prelude*, xiii. 262-3, 269-75. The last passage contains his famous praise of the inarticulate poets of homely life.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *Prelude*, xii. 287-335, where he associates the grief caused by his father's death with his tempestuous experience on the mountain side.



formed that habit of observing Nature lovingly and closely which makes his communing with her a thing different in kind from that of almost all his English predecessors. He hotly repudiates the idea that such observation meant taking a mere mechanical inventory of her details ; on the other hand the ' wise passiveness ' with which he taught that she should be watched, is no mere state of listless lethargy, but the mystical culmination of the intense activity with which he thought she should be wooed. It is such a spiritual state as this which produces the essential beauty of more than one of the Duddon Sonnets, and of the majestic description of moonrise upon the mountains in the fourteenth book of *The Prelude*, or that other description of the Green Linnet perched among the hazel trees :

Yet seeming still to hover  
There where the flutter of his wings  
Upon his back and body flings  
Shadows and sunny glimmerings  
That cover him all over.

Through watching came revelation, working immediately through symbol, and only afterwards reduced to the full consciousness of poetic thought. Wordsworth's highest poetry arrives by the short cut of inspiration at conclusions akin to those of the profoundest speculative reasoning.

Yet this had not always been so. There had been a time in his life, so he tells us—that of the *Evening Walk* and the *Descriptive Sketches*—when he had looked on Nature with the presumptuous eye of mere artistic diletantism ; he had savoured fastidiously

His early  
passion  
for  
Nature.

The winds,  
And roaring waters and the lights and shades  
That marched and countermarched about the hills  
In glorious apparition,<sup>1</sup>

had been

even in pleasure pleased  
Unworthily, disliking here, and there  
Liking, by rules of mimic art transferred  
To things above all art.<sup>1</sup>

Even when he had avoided this diletantism, he had still often regarded Nature merely with the physical eye which takes in the outer show of things, and is blind to

The affections and the spirit of the place.<sup>2</sup>

At this period he would have been moved<sup>3</sup> to draw Peele Castle but with the artist's hand,

And add the gleam,  
The light that never was, on sea or land,  
The consecration, and the poet's dream.

<sup>1</sup> *Prelude*, xii. 95–8, 109–12.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, xii. 120.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Walter Raleigh, *Wordsworth*, p. 108.

It was at this season that the sounding cataract haunted him like a passion, and the tall rock, the mountain and the deep and gloomy wood, were but

An appetite, a feeling and a love,  
That had no need of a remoter charm,  
By thought supplied, nor any interest  
Unborrowed from the eye.<sup>1</sup>

His later  
view of  
her.

But he was not long to remain thus. During his early manhood he had undergone a profound spiritual crisis, the result in great measure of his disillusionment with the French Revolution and with the sterile philosophy of William Godwin. From the gloomy despondency of this period he was rescued by the guidance of his sister Dorothy, by the companionship of Coleridge, and by the deeper understanding of Nature to which he was brought by their influence. As he grew in years, and came to scan Nature more piercingly, as, after his brother John's death, he came to read the book of life with the gloss of suffering, then

The intellectual power through words and things  
Went sounding on, a dim and perilous way,

and brought him into depths where he had never yet moved. The cataract became more to him than a passion; it became a Vision Beautiful, a symbol of scarce utterable things. His vision, like that of Blake, was henceforth as it had been in the beginning, 'twofold always', and he looked with contempt on 'the blind, mechanical talent that walks while the soul sleeps, with the mere activity of a blind somnambulism'. He regained once more the mood of his youth—the mood in which Jacob Boehme gazed on a green field before Görlitz till he saw the essences, use, and properties of the herbs and grasses, and through them the mysteries of the whole creation—the mood in which, as Wordsworth tells us:

with an eye made quiet by the power  
Of harmony and the deep power of joy,  
We see into the life of things.<sup>2</sup>

It is thus that he can say in words which are the final expression of his thought and poetry:

I have felt  
A presence that disturbs me with the joy  
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime  
Of something far more deeply interfused,  
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,

<sup>1</sup> *Lines composed above Tintern Abbey*, 79–82.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* 46–8, 92–101. In this passage Nature is the Revealer; for Nature the Healer, cf. *Tintern Abbey*, 134–46. For the conception of the human mind in its creative relation to Nature, cf. *Prelude*, ii. 368–74, iii. 133–5, xiv. 94–5. For Wordsworth's insistence on the moral independence and spiritual obligation of the soul, cf. *Excursion*, iv. 70–122, *Prelude*, x. 182–90, and the *Ode to Duty*.



And the round ocean and the living air,  
 And the blue sky, and in the mind of man :  
 A motion and a spirit, that impels  
 All thinking things, all objects of all thought,  
 And rolls through all things.<sup>1</sup>

The same thought is expressed once more in the *Address to Kitchurn Castle* :

Oh ! there is life that breathes not ; Powers there are  
 That touch each other to the quick in modes  
 Which the gross world no strength hath to perceive,  
 No soul to dream of.

This sense of a great unity, which comprised both Nature and himself, explained both her and him, and it also explained the profound feeling—some say of infinity—which all who have sought and loved Nature, have sometimes felt in her presence. The power, says Wordsworth,

which Nature thus  
 To bodily sense exhibits, is the express  
 Resemblance of that glorious faculty  
 That higher minds bear with them as their own.<sup>2</sup>

It was only the man who had thus heard the mighty stream of tendency, and looked with the eyes of the Spirit into Nature's soul, who could hope to recapture something of the glory which, as we are told in the great *Ode on Intimations of Immortality*, the new-born child brings with him from the unknown world, and which, in most men, shimmers gradually into nothingness under the beat of the world's garish light.

In the light of these considerations, it is not wonderful that in his essential interpretation of Nature Wordsworth should differ utterly from her chief modern interpreter, Meredith, whose views have been profoundly coloured by the teachings of modern science. To Meredith, as to Peter Bell, a primrose by the river's brim was still a yellow primrose—the loveliest nursling, doubtless, of the Valley Beautiful or the Woods of Westermain ; a flower instinct with Nature's message, and radiant with her glory ; yet having no part in anything which rose above her or informed her with infinity : an emblem, not a symbol ; a thing still physical, supplying to man rather a sublime text than a transcendent revelation. To Wordsworth, such a flower had part in something ' far more deeply interfused ' ; it was one with what Plato called the Soul of the World, and with something higher than that Soul ; it was one with the soul of man ; nay, it was Soul itself, and took delight in its existence. ' It is my faith', says Wordsworth, ' that every flower enjoys the air it breathes'. This conception may be attacked by those who would ' peep and botanize upon their mother's grave', as

Words-  
 worth and  
 Meredith.

<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> *Prelude*, xiv. 85-90.

by less ruthless investigators; but what these rationalists must not do, as Professor Raleigh has warned them, is deny that Wordsworth believed what he said, or attribute to his pleasant fancy what he has told us is his faith.

Wordsworth's  
Optimism.

And how does Wordsworth deal with the problem of evil in Nature? He does not, as a matter of fact, explicitly interpret this aspect of her, and he even, as certain of his critics have noticed, shows a tendency to shrink from discussing it. In his age the theory of the struggle for survival had not made its way insensibly into the minds of men, as it has among ourselves since the day of Darwin. This, however, is hardly a sufficient explanation of his attitude, for it would apply also to Alfred de Vigny, whose indictment of Nature<sup>1</sup> is, nevertheless, one of the most terrible ever penned. Whatever be the explanation, it is surely true that, in the words of Professor Bradley, 'Wordsworth yields here and there too much to a tendency to contrast the happiness, innocence, and harmony of Nature with the unrest, misery, and sin of man'. Yet when he came to the world of men and women, Wordsworth was in no sense blind to evil<sup>2</sup> and suffering, and if it be true, as Matthew Arnold declared, that he averted his ken from half of human fate, that half was certainly not the one which comprised the miserable and the outcast. In such poems as *Ruth*, *Michael*, *The Vision of Margaret*, *Simon Lee*, and innumerable others, as well as throughout the first and intermediate books of *The Excursion*, Wordsworth shows that he has gone into the depth of things, has read the innermost meaning of human sorrow, and has felt in himself and others the meaning of his own tremendous lines:

Suffering is permanent, obscure and dark,  
And shares the nature of infinity.

His  
Patriotic  
Poetry.

Closely akin to his conception of Nature, and of man's relation to her, is his conception of patriotism. The lesson of independence which she taught the Leech-gatherer on the lonely moor was also the lesson which she taught to the nations whose manly freedom was imperilled by their own sloth or the menace of a foreign power. At the time when Wordsworth began to realize that Napoleon had betrayed the principles of the French Revolution, and was threatening the freedom of the world, England was menaced both by the internal and the external danger, and in Wordsworth's view had become 'a fen of stagnant waters'; but his deep love and knowledge of her

<sup>1</sup> In *La Maison du Berger*.

<sup>2</sup> Wordsworth's conception of evil has been shown by Professor Bradley to be akin to that of Hegel, and to proceed on the assumption that it is the necessary correlative of good, that alone through evil, the negation, can good, the actuality, have positive being. It is his constant teaching that the soul by her own effort can wring good out of evil. Cf. *Excursion*, iv. 140-96, 1058-77; *Prelude*, viii. 647-50, x. 465 seq.



taught him that if she were true to her own greatness, she could conquer both herself and the foreign foe :

In our halls is hung  
Armoury of the invincible knights of old :  
We must be free or die, who speak the tongue  
That Shakespeare spake ; the faith and morals hold  
Which Milton held.—In every thing we are sprung  
Of Earth's first blood, have titles manifold.

It was in this faith that Wordsworth wrote the *Poems dedicated to National Liberty and Independence*, which perhaps contain his country's greatest patriotic poetry, and are inspired by the very spirit in which she entered on the latest and greatest of her wars, and carried it through to victory.

Special prominence has here been given to the transcendental aspects of Wordsworth's poetry, because the present writer, in contradistinction to most critics of the past generation, and to a few even of the present, is convinced that some such study is necessary to the full comprehension even of his simpler and less metaphysical poetry. Very many aspects of his poetic achievement must be left undiscussed here. Consideration of its form must be determined, at least in some measure, by his own expressed opinions regarding the nature of poetry. In the famous preface to the second edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth says : ' Between the language of prose and that of metrical composition, there neither is, nor can be, any essential difference ' ; again, he declares : ' poetry is but a selection of the real language of men ' , and, speaking of men in low and rustic life, he continues, ' the language of these men has been adopted. I have proposed to myself to imitate, and as far as possible to adopt, the very language of men. ' Coleridge, in his criticism of these passages, has cited three verses of Wordsworth's poem *The Sailor's Mother*, as being among the few examples of his work which fulfil exactly his own conditions, and has shown that these are emphatically not poetry. On the other hand, where Wordsworth does achieve true poetry, even of the simplest kind,<sup>1</sup> though the words may

His poetic theory and practice.

<sup>1</sup> For example :

Love had he found in huts where poor men lie ;  
His daily teachers had been woods and rills,  
The silence that is in the starry sky,  
The sleep that is among the lonely hills.

*Song at the Feast of Brougham Castle, 161-4.*

And he had trudged through Yorkshire dales,  
Among the rocks and winding scars ;  
Where deep and low the hamlets lie  
Beneath their little patch of sky  
And little lot of stars.

*Peter Bell, 226-30.*

The stars of midnight shall be dear  
To her ; and she shall lean her ear

be those of ordinary prose speech, the arrangement and the whole effect are emphatically not so. Still less is this the case in his more elaborate sonnets, or in *Laodamia*, or in the great *Odes*.<sup>1</sup> The language of these is clearly not the language of ordinary men, whether in the 'state of excitement' presupposed by Wordsworth, or otherwise. Imagination has come in and supplied far more than the 'certain colouring' which he demanded of her. The water has been turned into wine—by miracle, not by 'selection'. The secret of Wordsworth's, as of all poetry, lies in these other words of his :

A hundred times when roving high and low,  
I have been harassed with the toil of verse,  
Much pains and little progress : and at once  
Some lovely image in the song rose up,  
Full-formed, like Venus rising from the sea.<sup>2</sup>

Yet when all has been said the fact remains that Wordsworth's poetry, even though it never realizes his prose definition absolutely, is constantly—always, indeed, when most characteristic—closely akin to it, for good or for bad. In reading very many of his poems, both long and short, one is far more conscious of the 'toil' than of the 'progress'; as to the quality of many others, there is still doubt and dispute. His best lyrics and sonnets are consummate; and there is exquisite poetry throughout his two longest and greatest poems. Yet these must be read even as they were written, as wholes, and must not be threshed and winnowed out of their true shape and substance in the quest of formal beauty. It is easy to prove that the seventh book of *The Prelude*, or the sixth book of *The Excursion*, or *Goody Blake and Harry Gill*, or *Vaudracour and Julia* are not, for the most part, poetry; it is quite another matter to contend that they should, or may, be utterly neglected by those who would know the true meaning

In many a secret place  
Where rivulets dance their wayward round,  
And beauty born of murmuring sound  
Shall pass into her face.

*Lucy.*

<sup>1</sup> Or in such brief snatches of great poetry as :

Suffering is permanent, obscure and vast,  
And shares the nature of infinity.

or Fancy dreaming o'er the map of things.

or The intellectual power through words and things  
Went sounding on, a dim and perilous way.

or Each little drop of wisdom as it falls  
Into the dimpling cistern of his heart.

or Our noisy years seem moments in the being  
Of the eternal silence.

<sup>2</sup> *Prelude*, iv. 110-14.



of Wordsworth's mind and art. We are not here concerned with the mass of latter poetry which he wrote when inspiration had left him, or revisited him only fitfully. Through the truest and highest work of his genius he remains for most Englishmen the greatest of their poets since Milton.

Wordsworth's friend and fellow-poet of the Lakes, Robert Southey (1774-1843), is chiefly read to-day in certain of his shorter pieces, though his long poems were conceived with lofty purpose and plan. Of these *Joan of Arc* (1795), *Madoc* (1805), and *Roderick the Goth* (1814) were written in blank verse, the 'noblest measure', according to their author, of which the English language was capable. *Madoc* is an epic describing the adventures of a Cymric prince, who, like the Northmen of *The Earthly Paradise*, has sought refuge in a far land from the perils of his own country. In *Madoc's* case the land is Mexico, and the poem is given up to the strife and adventure encountered by him there, and in his own country, to which he returns for a period. *Roderick*, a more spirited and interesting poem, deals with the last phase in the history of the Visigoths, and with the warfare arising out of the enmity between the royal families of Chindasuintho and Wamba. The chief actors in the ensuing drama are Roderick himself, Pelayo, founder of the Spanish monarchy, the renegades Orpas and Count Julian, and Julian's daughter, Florinda. In 1801, Southey published *Thalaba the Destroyer*, a long, wild, Arabian tale written in the rhymeless stanzas of unequal line-length which had been suggested to him by the *Dramatic Sketches of Northern Mythology* of Dr. Sayers. The prosodic monotony and bathos into which this poem often falls are to a large extent avoided in *The Curse of Kehama* (1810), which allows rhyme while retaining the irregular stanza. Here again the tale is Eastern, and there are considerable power and imagination in the descriptions of the torment endured by Ladurlad under the imprecation of the 'Man-Almighty' Rajah. The chief remaining poem of this class is the *Tale of Paraguay* (1814).

The best of Southey's long poems contain remarkably fine things, and are readable through their swift sequence of vivid incident. They are written with dignity and ease; but these qualities kindle too seldom into genuine poetry: too often the impression left is merely that of determined and conscientious work. The same criticism may be made upon most of his romantic ballads, from the mass of which stands out the admirable *Queen Orraca*. There is a certain power in some of his poems of peasant life—for instance in *Jaspar*, which has affinities both with Crabbe's *Tales* and with *Peter Bell*. He could, at times, succeed in the grimly grotesque, as in *The Surgeon's Funeral*. Very many of his minor poems, however, labour with that malady of flatness which appears so distressingly in his *English Eclogues*, but from which his *Battle of Blenheim*, *Cataract of Lodore*, and *Inchcape Rock* so happily escape. His later poem, the *Vision of Judgment*, though it is

not without intrinsic merit, is chiefly remembered as having inspired the brilliant and annihilating reply of Byron which bears the same name.

Scott. Sir Walter Scott (1771–1832) had written by far the greater part of his poetry before his forty-third year, after which he devoted his chief energy to his great series of historical novels. Even in his childhood he had been a keen reader of poetry of all kinds, and his interest in old romance had been stirred by his grandmother's tales of Border depredation and adventure. He read Border ballads eagerly, and for seven successive years made pilgrimages into the wilds of Liddesdale in search of adventure and old song. For ballad literature he came to feel the same passion that had inspired Percy nearly a generation earlier. For a time he turned from the Scotch to the German ballad, and in 1796 he published a translation of Bürger's *Lenore*, and of other poems. Of far more moment is his great collection, *The Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (three volumes, 1802–3), which he compiled through love of ballads, and the desire that others should share that love. Some of the finest specimens in the language have been preserved through his industry and enthusiasm. Where the ballads existed in two or more versions, Scott compounded these so as to obtain the most poetical text: where they were defective, he filled in the gaps, and in some cases, as in *Kinmont Willie*, he built up anew from scanty fragments. There is no fair evidence for the contention that in certain cases he palmed off entire ballads of modern fabrication for ancient ones. One section of his collection, however, consists of modern ballads admittedly written in imitation of the old. Some of these, as *Cadyow Castle*, are his own; but they are not of his best, and cannot compare with the posthumously published ballads of Swinburne either for beauty or for fidelity to the old ballad music and spirit.

His hand-ling of the Ballad. His Lays. If Scott's practice of the ballad was not in itself notable at this period it had a notable consequence, for out of it sprang the long poems or lays which are the most widely read of all his writings in verse. Lady Dalkeith had suggested the topic of the goblin page, Gilpin Horner, as fit matter for the Border Minstrelsy; but Scott, when he began to work on it, found it too long for a ballad, and expanded it into the *Lay of the Last Minstrel* (1805). The original theme is ill developed, but the main story with which it is interwoven is admirably told in a swift and ringing metre; and many of the passages deserve the praise accorded by Pitt to the description of the old harper. The *Lay* was followed by a succession of long poems—*Marmion* (1808), *The Lady of the Lake* (1810), *Rokeby* (1813), *The Lord of the Isles* (1815), and the less successful *Bridal of Triermain* and *Harold the Dauntless*. Of these the *Lady of the Lake* is best told, and contains the finest poetry; but much of *Marmion* is greatly written, and few things of Scott's are more stirring than the canto on Flodden Field. In nearly all of these poems there are fine descriptions of scenery and of fighting, and the charac-



terization, if it generally lacks subtlety, seldom lacks colour, and is adequate at its best to the swift and simple movement of the tale. Scott's staple metres in these lays are the ballad measure, and the octosyllabic rhyming couplet, used either simply or in alternation with shorter rhyming lines;<sup>1</sup> and to these he constantly imparts the most admirable vigour and glow. His joy in natural beauty and in the romantic past give him kinship with more than one contemporary Southern poet. These poems provoked Byron to competition, and led him to write his own romantic lays; and it was partly from his sense that Byron had outdistanced him—'Byron bet me' he writes—that Scott ceased to practise the long poem.

Many of his lays—notably *The Lady of the Lake*—contain His Songs. lyrics of great beauty; and it is in the short poem or song that his poetry reaches its highest pitch. He excels in the lyric of action or swift emotion, such as the great *Coronach* and the *Pibroch of Donald Dhu*, and in such a fusion of lyric and ballad as *Bonny Dundee*. Some of his lighter songs—for instance, the Burns-like *David Caird's come again*—are admirable; but the greatest poem he ever wrote is the exquisite *Proud Maisie*.

The only serious doubt concerning the supreme value of Byron. Wordsworth's poetry centres round the question, which part of his work it is that counts for most. With George Gordon, Lord Byron (1788–1824), however, the case is different, for his very claim to be reckoned among England's greater poets has been hotly disputed from his day to our own, and the dispute seems likely to be kept up as long as English criticism lasts. European opinion, from Goethe's day to that of Mr. Georg Brandes has, for the most part, reckoned him second only in English poetry to Shakespeare. Goethe immortalizes him as Euphion in the Second Part of *Faust*, and in the beautiful song which he gives to that child of Faust and Helen, he offers devout homage to his spirit. In England, however, the case has been different; even during the tremendous European vogue which came to Byron before his death, there was steady protest in his own country against the insincerity of thought and slovenliness of form which have been considered his chief literary vices. Thackeray maintained that he never wrote from his heart, and Wordsworth declared that he never could love Nature genuinely or fervently, inasmuch as he took 'Life's rule from passion craved for passion's sake'. Since his own day his reputation as a poet has been subjected to a still fiercer assault, headed by Swinburne, who had been maddened by Matthew Arnold's perverse exaltation of him at the expense of Swinburne's own idol, Shelley. Opinion of our own day speaks with a divided voice: up till a few years ago most representative critics (for example, Professor Saintsbury) sided rather with Swinburne than with Arnold; but lately there has

<sup>1</sup> For a fuller description of Scott's metres, see Elton, *Survey*, vol. i, pp. 310–14.

been a marked reaction in Byron's favour.<sup>1</sup> It is not difficult to see how the discrepancies between the English and Continental estimates arose, nor what were the qualities in Byron which appealed to European critics. Except to an ear and mind highly trained in English poetry, Byron's rhetorical habit of over-emphasis, and his constant lapses from poetic form, would be less obvious than his dramatic and international posture of revolt. This is an aspect of English romanticism lower and far more easy to grasp than the pure, clear inspiration of Wordsworth, or the unearthly glory of Shelley. The very vices, moreover, of Byron's style give him, when read in translation, a certain advantage over his greater contemporaries; for in him it is the dross which falls away, in them the gold. In comparing the relative value of the European and English estimates, it must never be forgotten, first, that with regard to Byron's general position English opinion is still divided; and, second, that even that opinion has always admitted the transcendent excellence in its kind of a great part of his work. Nevertheless it is somewhat difficult to admit outright that 'the foreign estimate of his greatness is truer and sounder than the English estimate'. The position of Byron in German: in both cases the poet is more popular with general readers in foreign countries than with critics in his own; and in neither case is it yet quite possible to make any final or sweeping estimate of his position.

Phases of  
his poetry.

His earliest volumes were *Poems on Various Occasions* and *Hours of Idleness* (both 1807), which, except for *Lachin y Gair*, and one or two stray passages, contain little of poetry or promise. The attacks made upon the second volume elicited the rough but vigorous and racy *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, in which Byron satirizes his critics and rivals after the fashion which was to culminate in the masterly *Vision of Judgment*. In 1812 Murray accepted and published the first two cantos of *Childe Harold*, which recorded the grand tour Byron had made through Europe and the Near East in 1809-11. The immediate fame gained for him by this poem was enhanced by his series of Eastern tales, *The Giaour*, *The Bride of Abydos*, *The Corsair*, *Lara*, *The Siege of Corinth*, and *Parisina* (1813-16). In attempting this form he was largely influenced, as we have seen, by the work of Scott, whose vogue as a poet he immediately eclipsed. After his disgrace and flight from England in 1816, he travelled in Europe, and gave the result of his wanderings and thought to the world in the third (1816) and fourth (1818) cantos of *Childe Harold*. To this period belong *The Prisoner of Chillon* (1816) and *Mazeppa* (1819). His historical and other plays, *Manfred*, *Marino Faliero*, *Sardanapalus*, *The Two Foscari*, *Heaven and Earth*, *The Deformed Transformed*, *Cain*,

<sup>1</sup> The most learned and eloquent modern defence of him as poet and man occurs in Professor Elton's *Survey of English Literature, 1780-1830*, vol. ii, chap. 17.



and *Werner*, range between the years 1817 and 1824: of these the least successful are the purely historical, and the best are those which, like *Manfred* and *Cain*, embody the right 'Byronic' or semi-satanic spirit of revolt and defiance. But his most characteristic work, and that which has best assured his reputation with posterity, is contained in the free, light, and strong satiric and descriptive way of writing which began with *Beppo* (1818) and culminated in *The Vision of Judgment* (1822) and *Don Juan* (1819-24). It was Scott's proud boast on behalf of Byron 'that he managed his pen with the careless and negligent ease of a man of quality'. This contempt for the workmanlike and professional in literature is at once Byron's weakness and his strength. In the serious and heroic work which he had not yet learnt to lighten and leaven with satire, it constantly results in slovenliness, false emphasis, and hectic exaggeration. It made him write thus :

I can repeople with the past—and of  
The present there is still for eye and thought,  
And meditation chastened down, enough.<sup>1</sup>

and thus :

Yes—one—the first—the last—the best—  
The Cincinnatus of the West,  
Whom envy dared not hate,  
Bequeath'd the name of Washington,  
To make man blush there was but one!<sup>2</sup>

and thus :

Many things will have  
No end ; and some which would pretend to have  
Had no beginning, have had one as mean  
As thou ; and mightier things have been extinct  
To make way for much meaner than we can  
Surmise.<sup>3</sup>

The same quality gave an air of insincerity to much of his poetry of self-revelation and of Nature, especially where comparisons were possible, as in the first case with Rousseau, and in the second with Wordsworth.<sup>4</sup> But considerable injustice has been done to him by the assumption that insincerity of form necessarily means insincerity of feeling ; and whatever discords of diction or sentiment we may find in *Childe Harold*, we have absolutely no right to doubt that the closing stanzas of its third Canto represent Byron's authentic envisagement of his own soul. Still less have we the right to regard all his successes outside racy narrative and satire as mere accidents,

<sup>1</sup> *Childe Harold*, iv. 163-6.

<sup>2</sup> *Ode to Napoleon Buonaparte*.

<sup>3</sup> *Cain*, Act II, Sc. i.

<sup>4</sup> For Rousseau's influence on him, see *Childe Harold*, iii. lxxvi seq. Wordsworth's influence is strongly evident in *The Prisoner of Chillon* and *Childe Harold*, Canto iii. Regarding Canto iv, we find him writing to Murray, 'I have parted company with Shelley and Wordsworth: subject matter and treatment are alike new.'

or to close our eyes to the speed and glory of *Mazeppa*, to the vivid power of *The Dream*, to the many beautiful descriptive passages of *Childe Harold*, or to his best songs, or again to such lines as :

The chaos of events, where lie half-wrought  
Shapes that must undergo mortality.<sup>1</sup>

or :

Great is their love who love in sin and fear,<sup>2</sup>

or :

But I have seen the soaring Jungfrau rear  
Her never-trodden snow, and seen the hoar  
Glaciers of bleak Mont Blanc both far and near,  
And in Chimari heard the thunder-hills of fear,  
The Acroceraunian mountains of old name.<sup>3</sup>

On the other hand it was certainly not till he had learnt to lighten his musings with laughter and had deserted the Spenserian stanza, which he never understood or mastered, for the 'sparkling octaves' of *Don Juan* and *The Vision of Judgment*, that he found matter and metre fit for his passionate and mocking soul. We prefer the Pilgrim of Eternity when his solemn weeds take on a touch of motley, and in his last and best phase we can rejoice in the laughing or weeping loves of Juan and Julia and Haidee, no less than in the slashing wit and gusto which season his indictments of Southey and Wilkes and George III. For here Byron is 'rattling on exactly as he'd talk with anybody in a ride or walk'.<sup>4</sup> It was precisely in such communication as this that he excelled, nor could he ever have achieved such excellence had he taken a more fastidious and professional view of his art: so that in this context Scott's praise appears no mere perverse piece of snobbery, but becomes the recognition of a real and delightful literary quality.

Shelley.

The genius of Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822) may be variously considered according to its elements of intention or of inspiration. The passion for human freedom, material and spiritual, and the intense preoccupation with religious matters which led to his being sent down from Oxford, are the starting point of much of his finest poetry; and though that poetry in its consummation soars far beyond purposive reason, and the didacticism which Shelley professed so heartily to despise, no full understanding of it is possible without some study of his general attitude toward life. The most noticeable aspect of this throughout his early writings is the militant rationalism which produced the *Necessity of Atheism*; the notes to *Queen Mab* (1813), which he afterwards to some extent repudiated, a well-known passage of *The Revolt of Islam*, the terrible indictment of Christianity formulated by Theosophus in a *Refutation of Deism*, and the violent attacks on the same religion which appear in his letters to Peacock, Godwin, and Elizabeth

His  
religious  
faith.

<sup>1</sup> *Prophecy of Dante*.

<sup>3</sup> *Childe Harold*, iv. 653-8.

<sup>2</sup> *Heaven and Earth*.

<sup>4</sup> *Don Juan*, xv. 19.



Hitchener. A similar conviction appears in the identification in *Prometheus Unbound* of the Titan with the benign spirit of man, and of Jupiter with man's cruel and malign oppressor. This tendency in Shelley was undoubtedly intensified by the influence of his father-in-law, William Godwin, and innumerable examples of it might be cited from his prose and poetry. Yet his hatred of Christianity was combined with a profound reverence for the personality of Christ, as is evident from his *Essay on Christianity*, numerous passages of his letters, many of his poems, and the notes to these. Two things he hated with the greatest intensity—first, historical Christianity, or Paulinism, the assertion of dogma, and, as he considered it, of blind or wicked misinterpretation, the tradition of cruelty, oppression and intolerance, which, in his opinion, had darkened the light of Christ's teaching, and turned a religion of love into one of hatred and mistrust; and second, the Old Testament tradition, cruel, as he thought, and sinister, on to which the Gospel of Jesus had been grafted. How far these objections could be justified we are, of course, not concerned to determine here; but we must note that it is on these points mainly that his antipathy to Christianity turns, and that it therefore differs utterly from the anti-Christianity of Nietzsche, which struck at the very heart of Christ's teaching, in its ethical as well as in its traditional and supernatural aspects, and described the religion of love as the religion of slaves. Shelley hated 'Christianity', but he was absolutely at one with the spirit of Christ's own teaching, and would certainly have claimed to be a Christian in the sense that He was one.

Yet there is more in the matter than this. Shelley might logically have professed himself a reverent admirer of Christ, and yet have remained a mere rationalist, an eighteenth-century 'Aufklärer'. But he was much more than this. Plato, as we know from one of his letters, was his favourite author. He translated *The Symposium*; and such poems as *Adonais* and *Epipsychidion* are instinct with Platonic influence. He had also read a certain amount of modern transcendental philosophy, and these two influences, combined with his now strongly idealistic impulse, counteracted in his mind the cheap rationalism with which Godwin had imbued him, and led him to the conviction that 'the doctrines of the French and Material Philosophy are as false as they are pernicious'. He is, in fact, the most uncompromising of transcendental idealists, and those—and there have been such—who attempt to suppress or minimize this tendency, the very soul of his belief, are false guides to his thought and poetry. There was a principle within him, he tells us, which constantly transcended the 'Reason' appealed to by the Encyclopaedists, and forced him to believe in the immortality of the soul, and the existence of a Supreme Power which swayed the universe and suffused it with the spirit of Love. 'Reason', he says, 'tells me that death is the boundary of the life of man, yet I feel, I believe, the direct

contrary. The senses are the only inlets of knowledge, and there is an inward sense which persuades me of this.'

In his last sentence he is speaking with the voice with which Aristotle spoke in the *Posterior Analytics*—and there is a curious echo in one of his letters of the idea so prominent in the *Phaedo* of Plato that the body is only the contemptible prison-house of the immortal soul. 'Everything', he says, 'which relates simply to this clay-formed dungeon is comparatively despicable.' The ethical aspect of his idealism is seen in his far-reaching conception of universal charity and tolerance. Thus, he says in his *Letter to Lord Ellenborough*, 'The time is rapidly approaching—I hope that you, my Lord, may live to behold its arrival—when the Mahometan, the Jew, the Christian, the Deist, and the Atheist will live together in one community, equally sharing the benefits which arise from its association, and united in the bonds of charity and brotherly love.' A more spiritual and transcendental conviction appears in his conception of a future state in which the Particular shall be absorbed in the Universal, the individual soul in the transcendent, beneficent, and universal Power. Occasionally throughout his poems we find this conception appearing as a belief in separate personal immortality: more often, however, it is identified with the spirit which was the essence of his life and soul and thought—with his profound and ecstatic faith in—

That Light whose smile kindles the Universe,  
That Beauty in which all things work and move;  
That Benediction which the eclipsing Curse  
Of birth can quench not, that sustaining Love  
Which through the web of being blindly wove  
By man and beast and earth and air and sea,  
Burns bright or dim as each are mirrors of  
The fire for which all thirst.

These lines of his own are really the last word on his thought and teaching.

His belief in the spirit informing all existence was bound up with the fervid conviction that the ideal perfection of love and beauty could be, and must be, eventually realized both in life and art. The poignant and constant disappointment of this belief embittered many of his most intimate relations with his kind: yet the fervour with which he continued to hold it gives their distinctive beauty to many of his longer poems, and underlies the yearning of *Alastor* (1816), and *Prince Athanase* and *Epipsygidion* (1821), the revolt and indignation of *The Revolt of Islam* (1818) and *Prometheus Unbound* (1820), and the passionate yet transfigured grief of *Adonais* (1821). The moral and intellectual unworldliness of Shelley's character in the ordinary relations of life passes in his poetry into that peculiar unearthliness of beauty which colours nearly all its expression, whether abstract or dramatic or personal. Among such expressions the youthful *Alastor* represents the mood of personal aspiration and ecstasy which was to recur again, variously yet

The spirit  
and form  
of his  
poetry.



unmistakably, in the fragmentary *Prince Athanase*, in *The Triumph of Life*, in *Epipsychidion* and *The Sensitive Plant*. In *The Revolt of Islam*, though the form is narrative, the strivings and agonies of Laon, Cythna and their aged counsellor are still Shelley's: the inspired mysticism of *Adonais* is no less the monument of Shelley's faith than of Keats's memory; and the same personal fervour of aspiration underlies the dramatic grandeur of *Prometheus Unbound* and the dialogues and choruses of *Hellas* (1822), which poem, so Shelley tells us in his preface, 'derives its interest solely from the intense sympathy which the author feels with the cause he would celebrate.' In sharp and strange contrast to these symbolic dramas are *The Cenci* (1819)—in dramatic intensity and aloofness perhaps the greatest English play since the age of Shakespeare—and the fragmentary but powerful *Charles the First*. *Rosalind and Helen* (1818), often disparaged as a mere metrical treatise on the marriage question, is somewhat more than this psychologically and poetically, and contains some fine passages of natural description. In *Peter Bell the Third* (1819) Shelley tries his hand at satire, taking for his butt Wordsworth, who had already been pilloried in John Hamilton Reynolds's *Peter Bell the Second*. This poem is as racy and biting as *Swellfoot the Tyrant* (1820), directed at George IV, is heavy and awkward. *Julian and Maddalo* (1818), the vivid and intimate poem which records an adventure shared with Lord Byron in Venice, and the *Letter to Maria Gisborne* (1820), with its delightful picture of Shelley's life at Pisa, and of his literary friends in England, represent his easy mastery of poetic colloquy. At the opposite extreme is that elvish vision, *The Witch of Atlas* (1820), in whose perfect octaves the full splendour of imagination is shot with the lightest grace and glow of fancy. Other moods and masteries are evident in his Odes and Hymns, and in the various and exquisite music of the *Lines written among the Euganean Hills* (1818), which show us the poet's eye and soul communing through ecstasy with Nature and the spirit of the past. Though Shelley's reforming instinct frequently clashes with his poetic inspiration, it was often through that instinct that he found his voice, and in the choruses of *Prometheus Unbound* and *Hellas* he has achieved the ideal unity of thought and form.

The intensity and range of Shelley's delight in Nature, and the infinite variety of music in which that delight found voice, may be gathered from a glance at *The Ode to the West Wind*, *To a Skylark*, and *The Cloud*.<sup>1</sup> He differs from Byron in that he was a poet by technical no less than by emotional instinct: witness the infinite metrical subtlety and variety of his best

<sup>1</sup> Cf. also *The Question*, ii, iii. Shelley's intuition of Nature was as keen and various as Wordsworth's, but he depended far less closely than Wordsworth on Nature's symbols for his consciousness of the universal spirit, arriving at this partly by the *à priori* way of Plato, whom he knew and loved, but more constantly and directly through an inspired, subjective vision which has certain affinities with Blake's,

lyrics, and the all but perfect mastery with which he has handled innumerable English metres, from the great Spenserian stanza and the rhyming couplet, octosyllabic or decasyllabic, to the exotic terza rima. It is no false instinct which has coupled him with Spenser as 'the poet's poet'. It would hardly be too much to say that he recreated English lyric metre. There is no considerable poem of his from *Alastor* to *Adonais* which does not contain passages reaching the loftiest and rarest heights of poetry; on the other hand, he is no mere singer to the elect, for all who have touched the garment's hem of beauty may take joy in *Arethusa* or *Mutability*, or 'Life of Life! thy lips enkindle', or 'Swiftly walk over the western wave'.

Keats.

In John Keats (1795–1821) we have the remarkable case of a man who up till the age of twenty had, unlike Pope and Chatterton, shown no marked signs of poetic greatness, yet who dying at twenty-five left behind him a large amount of poetry ranking with the greatest in the language. Consideration of his work is impossible without reference to the poets who influenced him, for to such influence Keats was as keenly responsive as we know him, on Severn's testimony, to have been to the shifting moods and movements of Nature. As early as 1813 we find him listening delightedly to the *Epithalamium* of Spenser, read to him by his teacher, Charles Cowden Clarke, and in the same year he writes the *Imitation of Spenser* which appears in his volume of 1817. That fusion in poetry of sensuous and spiritual beauty which has endeared Spenser to all succeeding poets, found a ready response in Keats's soul, and the Spenserian influence is noticeable in him till the end, formally and explicitly in his early work, more deeply and spiritually in his intermediate and later. It was to another great Elizabethan, Chapman, that he owed chiefly his introduction to Greek poetry and mythology; and this debt he has acknowledged in a sonnet which is his earliest piece of truly great work. A more direct and personal influence was Leigh Hunt, whom he had first met in 1816. The same year saw the appearance of Hunt's *Story of Rimini*, with its preface containing the well-known attack on Pope's use of the heroic couplet, and its statement, curiously adapted from Wordsworth, that 'the proper language of poetry is in fact nothing different from that of real life'. The genial, versatile, and vulgar genius of Hampstead showed Keats great kindness, and for a period strongly influenced his outlook and work. One notable result of this influence was the attack made on Pope and his school in *Sleep and Poetry*, which earned for Keats the savage antipathy of Byron. Vastly inferior though Keats's first volume is to his later work, it already embodies that rich sensuousness of feeling and that love of old romance which are constant throughout his poetry. More positive, and, on the whole, very regrettable, evidence of Hunt's influence is visible in his second volume, *Endymion* (1818). The inscription of this poetic

His early poems.

*Endymion*.



romance to Thomas Chatterton, and its motto, 'the stretched metre of an antique song,' indicate the hold which the romantic past and its chief modern singer had won upon Keats's imagination. From the opening passage onward may be felt his young, keen delight in natural beauty, gaining always in intensity and fullness, and forecasting the full perfection of the *Ode to Autumn*. Constantly, too, we have glimpses of natural magic, of 'the wizard twilight Coleridge knew', in which imagination, now utterly freed from its trammels and working after its own law, fashions images of strange beauty. Throughout the poem there are many passages of high and sustained power, many unforgettable shorter passages, and many 'jewels five words long'.<sup>1</sup> Yet there are pains as well as pleasures for those who follow the blessed shepherd through his manifold adventures with Glaucus, Alpheus, and the rest, through his perplexing loves for Diana and the Indian maid, till the happy hour when, purified by sympathy with others' love, he finds that these two are not rivals, but one and the same dear being. The perspective of the poem is misty and unsure, and its action is involved and disconnected. The descriptive power frequently languishes, and there are desert stretches redeemed by few oases. The many crudities of detail are all the more obvious because they sometimes follow upon passages of rare beauty. For these shortcomings Hunt is partly responsible, though it is certainly not fair to attribute to his influence all the defects in Keats's early work. For all the faults of *Endymion*, there is little justification for the savage attack made upon it by Croker in the *Quarterly*, and there is none at all for the contemptible onslaught of Lockhart in *Blackwood*, which refers to Keats throughout as 'Johnny Keats' and bids him go back to his apothecary's shop.<sup>2</sup>

There is clear progress, and an acceptable restraint, due to *Lamia*. Keats's study of Dryden, in *Lamia* (1819). This story was suggested by a passage from Philostratus, quoted in Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, and deals with the love of the young Corinthian, Lycius, for the fair Lamia, eventually proved by the sage Apollodorus to be a snake in woman's form. Some have pretended to see in it an allegorical treatise on the relation between passion and intellect; but not even such an interpretation can destroy the beauties of the poem, which, in Keats's own opinion, was his most successful work. It is a typical example of his treatment of Greek mythology, and is instinct

<sup>1</sup> For example, 'The green evening quiet in the sun', 'apples wan with sweetness', 'My hair up-tying with fingers cool as aspen leaves'.

<sup>2</sup> To the former of these criticisms Keats's early death was attributed, satirically by Byron in *Don Juan*, seriously and with passionate resentment by Shelley in *Adonais* and its preface. It is certain, however, that the chief and original cause of his early decay was disease, though this may possibly have been to some extent aggravated by the rebuffs which he had experienced in love and literature.

with the spirit which led Shelley to exclaim, 'He was a Greek!' Though Keats's chief instructors in Greek and Latin had been such Elizabethans as Chapman and Sandys, there are innumerable passages throughout his work which seem to represent without mediation the very spirit of Greek poetry. Keats had as little first-hand Greek as had Shakespeare; yet the following passage of *Lamia* has the chaste simplicity of Sophocles at his highest:

He would return that way, as well she knew,  
To Corinth from the shore: for freshly blew  
The eastern soft wind, and his galley now  
Grated the quay-stones with her brazen prow  
In port Cenchreas from Aegina isle  
Fresh anchored; whither he had been awhile  
To sacrifice to Jove, whose temple there  
Waits with high marble doors for blood and incense rare.

But if the foregoing passage is wholly Greek, a different inspiration flames out in the famous and magical lines:

Besides, there, nightly, with terrific glare,  
Love, jealous grown of so complete a pair,  
Hover'd and buzz'd his wings, with fearful roar,  
Above the lintel of their chamber door,  
And down the passage cast a glow upon the floor,

and in these, describing the banqueting-hall which *Lamia* prepared for the lovers' marriage feast:

A haunting music, sole perhaps and lone  
Supportress of the faery roof, made moan  
Throughout, as fearful the whole charm might fade.

*Hyperion.* Of Keats's three longest poems, however, the fragmentary *Hyperion*<sup>1</sup> undoubtedly attains the most splendid moments, however much we may feel inclined to prefer the general construction of *Lamia*. Byron, no lover of Keats's early work, justly remarked that this poem was Aeschylean in its majesty, while Shelley described it as 'an astonishing piece of writing'. The sorrows of Saturn and the dethroned Titans, their eager desire to regain their supremacy over the usurping Olympians, the glorious beauty of *Hyperion*, the Titanic forerunner of the sun-god Apollo, might well inspire splendid poetry. Keats's close study of Milton is here at once the curbing and strengthening force, and, as he himself confessed, a definite source of technical weakness and artificiality. From the very pen of Milton at his best might have come such lines as these:

From chaos and parental darkness came  
Light, the first fruits of that intestine broil,  
That sullen ferment, which for wondrous ends  
Was ripening in itself. The ripe hour came,  
And with it light, and light, engendering  
Upon its own producer, forthwith touch'd  
The whole enormous matter into life.

<sup>1</sup> Written chiefly during 1818.



Thoroughly Miltonic, too, is the description of 'Hyperion at the end of Book II, and only a little less so are the glowing lines in Book I, describing the Titan's palace :

His palace bright,  
Bastion'd with pyramids of glowing gold,  
And touched with shade of bronzed obelisks,  
Glared a blood-red through all its thousand courts,  
Arches, and domes, and fiery galleries ;  
And all its curtains of Aurorian clouds  
Flushed angerly.

Nor can any reader of the following passage fail to be reminded of Satan's flight from the 'primum mobile' to Earth in Book III of *Paradise Lost* :

Ere half this region-whisper had come down  
Hyperion arose, and on the stars  
Lifted his curved lids, and kept them wide  
Until it ceased : and still he kept them wide ;  
And still they were the same bright, patient stars.  
Then, with a slow incline of his broad breast,  
Like to a diver in the pearly seas,  
Forward he stoop'd over the airy shore,  
And plunged all noiseless into the deep night.

But mingling with this deeper music is a magic strain which even Milton could never have compassed—a strain that is at once the voice of Keats and of Romance. Here, for instance, is the simile suggested by the recumbent Titans :

Like a dismal cirque  
Of Druid stones upon a forlorn moor,  
When the chill rain begins at shut of eve  
In dull November, and their chancel vault,  
The Heaven itself, is blinded throughout night.

Here again, we have the same magic :

As when, upon a tranced summer night  
Those green-robed senators of mighty woods,  
Tall oaks, branch-charmed by the earnest stars,  
Dream, and so dream all night without a stir  
Save from one gradual solitary gust,  
Which comes upon the silence, and dies off,  
As if the ebbing air had but one wave.

*The Fall of Hyperion* is a not very successful attempt made by Keats during the last few months of 1819 to rewrite *Hyperion* in the form of an allegorical vision shown by Moneta, the prophetess of Saturn, to the poet himself.

Keats's shorter narrative poems are all in their respective *Isabella*. ways strongly influenced by his passion for mediaevalism. The earliest of them, *Isabella, or The Pot of Basil* (1818), is taken from Boccaccio, though it really represents the spirit of an earlier day. The moving grace of the old story, the tenderness and keen sense of tragedy with which Keats has rehandled it, and the simple beauty of many of its incidental passages, give

the poem high place among his work. There are minor blemishes. The rhetorical questionings of stanza XVI, the strained description of the brothers in the last lines of stanza XVII, and the intrusive apostrophes of stanzas LV and LXI show that Keats has not yet reached his full strength; but these shortcomings are more than redeemed by the exquisite passages in which human feeling is associated with natural loveliness (XXXII, XXXVIII, XXXIX, and LIII); and the poem's whole beauty and tragedy are summed in the magnificent central stanza:

I am a shadow now, alas! alas!  
 Upon the skirts of human nature dwelling  
 Alone: I chant alone the holy mass,  
 While little sounds of life are round me knelling,  
 And glossy bees at noon do fieldward pass,  
 And many a chapel bell the hour is telling,  
 Paining me through: those sounds grow strange to me,  
 And thou art distant in Humanity.

*The Eve of St. Agnes* and other poems. More perfect, if less intense, is *The Eve of St. Agnes* (1819). Here Keats has turned away from Milton and reverted not only to the stanza, but to the spirit, of Spenser. The rich and various colouring of the poem, and the magic blending of the sensuous with the spiritual, are perfectly in the older poet's manner. The subject is mediaeval, however, and was probably suggested to Keats by a passage in Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* (III. 2, 3). Whereas the tale of Lorenzo and Isabella had been tragedy, that of Porphyro and Madeline is pure romance, and romance held aloof from life by the strangeness of its atmosphere, and the more than earthly beauty of its colouring. This, it has been said, is the first of Keats's longer poems in which we would wish no line or stanza altered or erased. In the fragmentary *Eve of St. Mark* (1819), Keats's octosyllabic couplet moves with freedom and variety, and he displays two different masteries in the fine opening picture of a chilly English spring, and in the rich pre-Raphaelite detail of the passage describing Bertha and her room. In a letter to his brother, he writes that the poem is 'quite in the spirit of town quietude. I think it will give you the sensation of walking about an old country town in a coolish evening'. Nowhere is his touch more sure than here. Yet there was a still higher perfection to come in *La Belle Dame sans Merci* (1819), which in its short compass embodies all that is most elvish and tragic in the mediaeval imagination. The intensity and chaste beauty of this poem give it place among Keats's greatest poetry. The ballad metre is here restricted to quatrains, and the magic foreshortening of

<sup>1</sup> Suggested, according to D. G. Rossetti, by the legend 'that if a person on St. Mark's Eve placed himself near the church porch when twilight was thickening, he would behold the apparitions of those persons in the parish who were to be seized with any severe disease that year, go into the church'.



the last line, without forbidding variety, gives each verse, as Professor Elton has remarked, ' a spondaic, tolling close.'

The later Odes <sup>1</sup> naturally tell us more of Keats's mind, and its emotions and ecstasies, than do the dramatic poems. The perfect image embodied in the central stanza of the *Ode to Autumn* might be taken as the symbol, not of Autumn alone, but of all Nature and her beauty as seen and felt by Keats. There is nothing here of the self-conscious transcendentalism of *Lines written above Tintern Abbey*: the poet is to find his Absolute in loveliness, and to express his worship of Nature through the sensuous ecstasy of his song. The same sensuousness, and the same ecstasy of Nature-worship appear in the *Ode to a Nightingale*; and that supreme faith in Beauty which was a main part, though by no means the whole, of Keats's religion, becomes explicit in the closing lines of the *Ode on a Grecian Urn*. A more intimate beauty is that of the *Ode to Melancholy*, throughout which runs the undercurrent of sadness so steady in Keats's soul. It was this quality which, outside poetry, gave increasing depth and seriousness to his intuition of the world, and made him long for leisure in which to devote himself to philosophy and general study.

His Odes.

It is at once fascinating and unprofitable to speculate as to what Keats might have achieved had he lived to the age of Shakespeare, and been ' nerved up to the writing of a few fine plays ', which, as he assures us, was his greatest ambition; but the tendency of modern criticism has been increasingly to recognize, not only the loveliness of his accomplished work, but the growing depth and fullness, and the Shakespearean universality, of his outlook.<sup>2</sup>

*Gebir*, the first considerable poem of Walter Savage Landor (1775-1864), was published in 1798, the year of the *Lyrical Ballads*, and narrates in seven books of blank verse the loves and death of a mythical Spanish king. Landor's choice of metre, and his conscious rejection of the couplet, are instructive as showing the tendency of the age—' I have chosen blank verse ', he writes, ' because there never was a poem in rhyme that grew not tedious in a thousand lines.' *Gebir* is perhaps less read and remembered as a whole than for the frequent beauty of its parts. Though its language is too often forced and awkward, it can rise to perfect passages, and occasionally achieves an almost Miltonic majesty. Miltonic, too, is Landor's zest for a succession of beautiful proper names. Throughout *Gebir*, as through all Landor's poetry, the Greek and Latin influence is strong, and Landor actually turned the poem into Latin in the year after its original appearance in English. The romantic imagination, which in its highest form was expressly denied to Landor by Coleridge (*Table Talk*, January 1, 1834), seems

Landor—  
*Gebir*.

<sup>1</sup> All of the four Odes here mentioned were written in 1819.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. A. C. Bradley, *The Letters of Keats*, in his *Oxford Lectures on Poetry*. One of the best critical estimates of Keats is that prefixed by Mr. E. de Sélincourt to his edition of Keats (Methuen, 1905).

evident in the often-quoted passage describing the sea-shells in Book I, in the fine incantation scene between Myrthyr and the witch-wife Dalica at the end of Book V, and in such lines as

How whirlpools have absorbed them, storms o'erwhelmed,  
And how amidst their struggles and their prayers  
The big wave blackened o'er the mouth supine. (Book VI.)

or

What potent hand hath touched thy quickened corse,  
What song dissolved thy cerements: who unclosed  
Those faded eyes, and filled them from the stars? (Book V.)

or

One that had called her in the morn, observed  
How virgin passion with unfuelled flame  
Burns into paleness. (Book VII.)

*The  
Hellenics.*

Nearly fifty years later, in 1847, Landor published the *Hellenics*, a still more famous volume, consisting of poems on Greek subjects which he had written at irregular intervals during the preceding years. Many of these, as the short and exquisite *Death of Artemidora*, combine great tenderness of feeling with all the marble clearness of Heredia's best sonnets.

His  
shorter  
poems.

Landor is the greatest master in English of the short epigram, playful, graceful or pathetic, written after the Greek model; and he divides with Prior the honours of the highest kind of occasional verse. Of the former kind the most famous examples are the beautiful *Diree*, and the lines on himself beginning, 'I strove with none.' In *Clementina's artless mien* and *Household Gods* are good examples of verse written in lighter vein, yet remaining true poetry. More intense and tragic is the beautiful *Rose Aylmer*. Of Landor's four blank-verse dramas the best, and the best known, is the noble *Count Julian*.

Moore.

Thomas Moore (1779-1852) is included by Shelley in *Adonais* as one of the chief poets of his day. Later criticism has been less merciful towards him, and beside the work of such modern Irish poets as Yeats, and 'A.E.', a great part of his verse seems crude, conventional, and even vulgar. Yet he had a fine and true gift of song writing, and it is probably by such lyrics as 'Oft in the Stilly Night', and others appearing in his *Irish Melodies* (1807) or elsewhere, that his fame will live, rather than by the worthy and laborious *Lalla Rookh* (1817), or his smooth but undistinguished renderings of *Anacreon* (1800). A good deal of fastidious modern criticism upon Moore proceeds from the rather ludicrous assumption that a song must needs be inferior because it has taken a strong hold on the people.

Hood.

Equally popular through some of his verse—for example, *The Bridge of Sighs* and *The Song of the Shirt*—but at his best a far finer artist, is Thomas Hood (1799-1845). His work falls into two sharply divided classes of humorous and serious. Unfortunately his reputation with the many is chiefly that of



the racy jingler or punster who wrote *Miss Kilmansegg* and *Sally Brown*, and the description of the Chinaman :

His head was turned, and so he chewed  
His pigtail till he died.

His real strength, however, is to be found in his graver work, which includes his best songs, with their individual and perfect melody; his best sonnets; the two poems already mentioned, which express the tragedy of the lowly and outcast; his finely Poe-like *Haunted House*; and such longer poems as the Spenserian *Two Swans* and the semi-Spenserian *Plea of the Midsummer Fairies*. His fame has suffered through the hack-work to which he was driven by poverty: yet he remains a master of English poetry in more than one of its kinds.

Thomas Campbell (1777-1844) first won pelf and fame through *The Pleasures of Hope*, written when he was twenty-two. This collection was composed in the couplet, which Campbell in the lengthy and rather tedious *Gertrude of Wyoming* (1809) deserted for the Spenserian stanza. His real strength and fame lie, not in the long philosophic or narrative poem, but in songs and ballads, patriotic like *Ye Mariners of England*, *The Battle of the Baltic*, and *Hohenlinden*, or romantic like *Lochiel's Warning* and *Lord Ullin's Daughter*. Campbell.

Samuel Rogers (1763-1855), banker and lavish entertainer of literary men, wrote *The Pleasures of Memory* (1792) and *Italy* (1822), neither of which has more than an historical interest in our day. James Hogg (1770-1835), the 'Ettrick Shepherd' of 'Christopher North's' *Noctes Ambrosianae*, lives by a few of the ballads—for instance, *Donald McGillivray*, and 'Lock the door, Lariston'—occurring in *The Forest Minstrel* (1810), and elsewhere; and by *The Queen's Wake* (1813), a succession of tales and songs sung to Mary, Queen of Scots, by competing bards. This collection contains the finely conceived *Kilmeny*, the tale of a mortal maiden stolen by fairies and restored seven years later to the bewilderment of earth. Allan Cunningham (1784-1842) belongs in spirit to the age of Burns, and carries on, though with no great mastery, the tradition of the 'makars'. On a lower level ranks William Thom (1798-1848), author of *Rhymes and Recollections of a Handloom Weaver*. With these we are on the eve of a fresh transition. Rogers, Hogg, and others.

## CHAPTER XXVII

MISCELLANEOUS PROSE OF THE EARLY  
NINETEENTH CENTURY

Rise of the Reviews — Jeffrey, Sydney Smith, Brougham — The great Essayists: Lamb, Hazlitt, De Quincey, Southey, Coleridge—Landor, Cobbett — Historians and Philosophers.

The Rise  
of the  
Reviews  
—Jeffrey  
and the  
*Edin-  
burgh*.

THE end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth was a period prolific in great essayists, whose careers were largely determined by the rise of such famous reviews and magazines as the *Edinburgh*, the *Quarterly*, *Blackwood*, and the *London Magazine*. The growth of the new spirit is as strongly evident in these writers as in the poets of the period, and may be best illustrated by a survey of their work. *The Edinburgh Review* was a quarterly founded in 1802 and conducted mainly in the Whig interest by Jeffrey, Sydney Smith, and Brougham. Smith edited its first number, but after his departure from Edinburgh to London, his place was taken by Jeffrey, then a briefless advocate at the Scottish Bar, and subsequently a Scottish judge. The first number of the *Review* made a great impression, both in England and Scotland, and its reputation was sustained by the continued brilliancy of its articles. 'The *Edinburgh*', said Jeffrey, 'has but two legs to stand on. Literature is one of them, but its right leg is politics.' It was in virtue of the left leg that Scott, the high Tory, became an early contributor to the *Review*. The moving spirits remained the three men just mentioned. From first to last Jeffrey contributed some two hundred articles to the *Edinburgh*, and these display considerable fluency and force of style, and a judgment which was acute and just within its not very wide limits. He did small justice to Shelley and Keats, though his review of *Endymion* is discrimination itself compared with the *Blackwood* article. The opening words of his criticism on Wordsworth's *Excursion*—'This will never do'—have become a by-word, though that criticism as a whole is by no means cruel or unfair.

Sydney  
Smith.

The contributions of Sydney Smith are distinguished by balance, sanity, and a dislike of mysticism; but above all by the incorrigible and irresistible sallies of wit and humour which seem subsequently to have told against him when his name was proposed for a bishopric. It was Smith who suggested as a punning motto for the *Edinburgh* the Virgilian tag *Tenui musam meditamur avena*. For this was eventually substituted the even more appropriate *Iudex damnatur cum nocens absolvitur*. Perhaps Smith's best-known work is his *Letters of Peter Plymley*, written in favour of Catholic Emancipation.

Brougham. The most notable qualities of Henry Brougham (1778–1868), subsequently Lord Chancellor of England, were his



energy and versatility. There was a tradition that all the twelve articles in one number of the *Edinburgh Review* came from his hand. But neither in thought nor style had his writings the qualities of permanence.

In February 1809 appeared the first number of *The Quarterly Review*, published by the great John Murray in the Tory interest, and in direct opposition to the *Edinburgh*. Its editor till 1824 was the much-abused William Gifford, the editor of Ben Jonson and Massinger, the relentless foe of all Radicals and Lake poets, and the victim of Hazlitt's fiery scorn. Scott, who had now thrown over the *Edinburgh*, contributed no fewer than four articles to the first number, and reviewed his own *Tales of My Landlord* in the number of January 1817. Southey, who had been bitterly attacked by Jeffrey, and had refused on principle to write for the *Edinburgh*, contributed some of his finest prose to the *Quarterly*, and became, in Gifford's words, 'the sheet-anchor of the Review'. The most notorious article ever published in the *Quarterly* was the review of *Endymion*, now known to have been written by J. W. Croker, which was said to have hastened Keats's death. After 1825 the *Quarterly* was edited by Scott's biographer and son-in-law, John Gibson Lockhart. Eight years before this date Lockhart had united with John Wilson (Christopher North) in the founding of *Blackwood's Magazine* (*Maga*), a Tory organ intended by the celebrated publishers whose name it bore to defeat the *Edinburgh* in its northern stronghold. Many of its articles were written with trenchant invective. Perhaps the most notorious, and certainly from our present point of view the most interesting, were the coarse and brutal series directed against the 'Cockney school of poets'—as they had been dubbed by the magazine—who included Leigh Hunt, Keats, Charles Lamb, and Charles Lloyd. These were written by Lockhart, but it is distressing to know that Scott himself had a hand in the most vulgar and unpardonable of them all—that in which Keats is apostrophized as 'Johnny Keats', and advised to go back to his apothecary's shop. To the credit, however, of *Blackwood's* must be set the *Noctes Ambrosianae*, a series of racy and admirable conversations on politics, literature, art, and life, of which the greater part were written by 'Christopher North' (John Wilson), then Professor of Moral Philosophy at Edinburgh University. De Quincey and Hogg, who were both regular contributors to the *Review*, figure in the *Noctes* under the names of 'the English Opium-Eater' and 'the Ettrick Shepherd'.

From the point of view of literary history, the most important of all these periodicals was the shortest-lived—*The London Magazine* (1820-9), directed by that great editor, John Scott, till he was killed (1821) in a duel at Chalk Farm by Lockhart's friend, Christie. In 1821 the *London* published the first instalment of De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, and in the next year appeared Lamb's deathless

*The Quarterly.*

*Blackwood*

'Christopher North.'

*The London Magazine*

*Dissertation on Roast Pig*. Both of these writers found in the *London* their first introduction to essay writing. On its list of contributors were Leigh Hunt, Hazlitt, and Keats.

Lamb.

If the *London Magazine* had done nothing more than give Charles Lamb (1775–1834) his chance of self-expression, it would still have established a notable reputation. The *Essays of Elia* are by far his greatest work, and are like nothing else in English literature, or in any literature. The subjects are various: *Christ's Hospital* describes the boyhood of Lamb and Coleridge; *Old Benchers of the Inner Temple*, *The South Sea House*, and *Blakesmore in H—shire*, enshrine memories of Lamb's childhood and early manhood. Other essays are devoted to his favourite actors—for, as he has told us, he was 'the finest playgoer in the world'—or describe his books and their borrowers—'the great race'.

In mood as in theme the *Essays* are delightfully various. The *Dissertation on Roast Pig* is sheer fun, and *Dream Children* sheer poetry. The subjects matter little, except in so far as they display that rare blend of the whimsical and the lovable which was Charles Lamb's nature. He ever longed for the remote, that on which time had cast its glamour and its consecration. This preference appears obviously in his love of sixteenth-century drama and of seventeenth-century prose, and more subtly in his own style; for he avoided the trick and colour of modern prose, and, as he has told us, 'wrote for antiquity'. He loved the quaint literary charm of authors like Browne and Burton, no less than the quaint personal charm of human oddities like George Dyer. His life and thought were based on preferences as those of many meaner men are based on principles. His delight in Elizabethan poetry appears in his own finely poetical tragedy, *John Woodvil* (1802), no less than in the precious notes with which he enriched his *Specimens of the English Dramatic Poets* (1808); and it is evident again in the *Tales from Shakespeare* (1807), which he wrote in partnership with his sister Mary. These last two volumes helped greatly to revive interest in the great romantic drama of England. Outside the *Essays*, Lamb's most notable piece of prose is the fine and tragic *Tale of Rosamund Gray* (1798). The best known and most moving of his poems is *The Old Familiar Faces*. For all Englishmen he remains the

gentlest name

That ever clothed itself with flower-sweet fame,  
Or linked itself with loftiest names of old  
By right and might of loving.

Leigh  
Hunt.

James Henry Leigh Hunt (1784–1859) deserves mention here chiefly for his *Essays*, which appeared in a succession of magazines with which he was connected, and were subsequently republished in book form under various titles. His usual style is of the kind recently described by Sir William Watson



as the 'loquitive': its ease and flow commend it, but it has little distinction, and is constantly slipshod. Leigh Hunt's range of literary sympathy was wide, and in his critical writings he displays the tolerance and good-nature which endeared him personally to his contemporaries, and are evident in his very readable *Autobiography*, and his chatty volume on London, *The Town*.

A much greater figure is William Hazlitt (1778-1830). His first love had been painting, which he practised in London in the studio of his brother John; but two experiences turned him toward literature—his reading, in 1796, of Burke's *Letter to a Noble Lord*, and his meeting with Coleridge, whom he heard preach at Wem, and subsequently welcomed—and worshipped—in his father's house. From hence onwards Hazlitt's life-interest lay in literature, and he becomes the typical man of letters of the period, living by prose, which he wrote incessantly. In 1805 he published his *Essay on the Principles of Human Action*. This work is little read now, but the metaphysical interest which informs it reappears in many of Hazlitt's general essays, and helps to give them their distinctive colour and glow. His apprenticeship in painting quickened that sense of natural beauty which inspired some of his finest descriptions. Towards the end of his life he published a *Life of Napoleon* (1828), and has left other long compositions. But the works by which he chiefly lives are his essays—critical, as his *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays* (1817), and *Lectures on the English Comic Writers* (1819); or general, as *Table Talk* (1821-2), *The Spirit of the Age* (1825), and the posthumously collected *Winterslow* and *Sketches and Essays* (both 1839). Whether he is commenting on books or on life Hazlitt shows the same qualities of insight, vigour, and gusto. His criticism of Shakespeare and other English writers is intensely personal, and is in this sense typical of the literary spirit of the age; but its virility and fervour prevent its degenerating into mere impressionism. Like Swinburne, Hazlitt relies chiefly on his own enthusiasm to kindle the reader's appreciation of the author under review; but through sheer force of genius he avoids many of the pitfalls in the path of subjective criticism. The force and beauty of his style are perhaps at their highest in such imaginative essays as *The Feeling of Immortality in Youth* and *On the Fear of Death*. Many passages in *Winterslow* are winged with his keen joy in Nature. *The Fight* shows his genius for describing action, and, though challenged by certain pages of Borrow and Meredith, remains the greatest description of a prize-fight in the language. The essay on Gifford in *The Spirit of the Age* is a tremendous piece of invective, just as that on Scott in the same collection is masterly in its apportionment of praise and blame. Space will not permit of any detailed analysis of his style: it is sufficient to say that his fervour and force and swing give him a place apart among English

Hazlitt.

prose writers, and justify the remark of Stevenson, 'We are all mighty fine fellows, but none of us can write like Hazlitt'.

De Quincey.

Thomas De Quincey (1785–1859) was, from the beginning, a fervently imaginative being, as may be seen from his *Autobiography*, with its account of the strange kingdoms, Gombroon and Tigrosylvania, created and peopled by his childish fancy. While still an Oxford freshman he had opened a correspondence with Wordsworth, whom he subsequently joined at Grasmere in 1809, enjoying here the friendship of Coleridge and Christopher North. Despite these advantages he published practically nothing till his thirty-sixth year, when his *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* appeared in the *London Magazine*. After this he wrote extensively on a vast number of subjects, touching on many of the essentials of life, such as economics, history, metaphysics, and murder. His best work falls into two main kinds, the confessional and the imaginative. Both of these are blended in the masterpiece first mentioned, and in the *Autobiographical Sketches* which he began to publish in 1832. These two works describe his childhood, youth, and early manhood, often with a matchless vividness and a familiar warmth of self-revelation, and, occasionally, with a charming humour. Among the most famous passages of the *Confessions* are those which relate how he first took to opium, and how he nearly starved in London, but was relieved by an outcast girl called Anne, who spent her last sixpence on a glass of wine to revive him, and subsequently vanished utterly from his ken. That part of the *Confessions* which deals with his opium-dreams passes naturally into the realm of imagination, and takes form in some of his most splendid prose. An even higher flight is found where imagination is completely free, as it has become in *Levana and our Ladies of Sorrow*, and *Savannah-La-Mar*. In both of these there is an intensity of feeling and expression which almost bursts the bounds of prose. De Quincey's greatest piece of historical writing is undoubtedly *The Revolt of the Tartars*, and his most successful story is *The Spanish Military Nun*. Admirable in their kind are *The English Mail Coach*, and his critical paper on the *Knocking at the Gate in Macbeth*. His great faults are a constant tendency to digression, and what has been termed 'rigmorole'; and a less constant proclivity to awkward buffoonery. At its best—and that best is frequent throughout his work, though it is not frequently sustained—his prose has an intense and various music which gives him place among the great masters.

Landor.

De Quincey, Hazlitt, and Charles Lamb, all in their different ways, helped to liberate English prose and to equip it anew. Different from all these in essentials, yet of hardly less influence upon the development of our literature, was Walter Savage Landor (1775–1864), whose poetry we have considered elsewhere. The first two volumes of his *Imaginary Conversations* were published in 1824, and three fresh series had appeared



by 1830. These were followed by three longer works, *The Citation and Examination of William Shakespeare* (1834), *Pericles and Aspasia* (1836), and *The Pentameron* (1837), of which the first and last are in conversational form. The men and women of the *Conversations* are of all climes and ages. They discuss all things essential in life, and many things not essential. Often, as in certain of the Roman *Conversations*, Landor revives the colour of a bygone age with a vividness hardly bettered by Flaubert or Anatole France. But apart from his power of historical reconstruction and vast range of subject, his royal mastery of English makes him a great figure in the evolution of English literature. His style combines classical strength and dignity with romantic colour and charm, and possesses an air of aristocratic distinction all too rare in the prose of the period.

In his most widely-read volume, *Rural Rides*, William Cobbett (1762–1835) gives his views on English life in its political, sociological, and agricultural aspects. We are here concerned less with these than with the forcible and homely style in which his theories are expressed. His language is always perfectly fitted to his subject, whether for invective, argument, or description, and his homespun periods hold a worthy place in the development of our prose literature.

Cobbett—  
*Rural Rides.*

Robert Southey (1774–1843) has already been mentioned in connexion with the *Quarterly Review*. In a work of wider scope it would be necessary to trace his political development from the early Jacobinism which caused him to go with his hair unpowdered at Oxford, to the later high-Toryism which made him the victim of Byron's *Vision of Judgment*. Here we can only discuss briefly his chief prose works, and the style in which they were written. All through his life Southey had to work hard for bread, in a day when a sufficiency even of this was not easy to gain by the pen. His works number such long histories as those of Brazil (1810–19), and the Peninsular War (1822–32); biographies, of which the greatest are the *Lives of Nelson* (1813) and of *Wesley* (1820); and an enormous number of critical and general articles. His long work, *The Doctor*, now read, and readable, by few, is a remarkable combination of learning, whimsicality, and horseplay. *Sir Thomas More* (1829) is a series of colloquies on life between himself and More's ghost. Southey's style is clear, elegant, and flexible, and rises to a high level in such works as *The Life of Nelson*, where his theme is lofty and his imagination has been touched; but it is in general true of him that he 'has little genius', and 'that his achromatic prose, with all its effortless ease and rightness, leaves us impatient and dissatisfied'.<sup>1</sup>

Southey.

Just as the greatest poem of S. T. Coleridge is *The Ancient Mariner*, so his greatest work in prose is *Biographia Literaria*. Besides much metaphysical matter foreign to our present

Coleridge.

<sup>1</sup> Oliver Elton, *Survey of English Literature, 1780–1830*, vol. ii, p. 9.

discussion, this work contains his famous distinction between the Fancy and the Imagination, and his illuminating, if not always convincing, estimate of Wordsworth's poetry. In many parts of the *Biographia Literaria*, in the *Aids to Reflection*, and the magazine articles collected and reprinted from *The Friend*, Coleridge has a tendency to discursiveness, to mistiness, and—*tranchons le mot*—to dullness. But when the spirit is in him he writes with inspiration and insight probably unparalleled in English criticism; and there are few of his pages which do not contain strokes of lofty genius. His Shakespearean criticism, though marked in an unusual degree by his besetting faults, has gone far toward moulding modern appreciation of Shakespeare. He is the critic and philosopher as well as the poet of Romanticism, and in two of the three kinds he is supreme.

**Historians.** We may here mention briefly the chief historians and philosophers of the early eighteenth century. *The History of Greece* of William Mitford (1744–1827), in spite of its great contemporary vogue, is as little read now as is his interesting treatise on prosody. William Roscoe's *Life of Lorenzo de Medici* (1796) and his *Leo X* (1805) are still read, as is John Lingard's *History of England* (1819–30), written largely from the Roman Catholic standpoint. Of greater literary force and vividness is the *History of the Peninsular War* (1828–40) by Sir William Napier (1785–1860), a work which completely eclipsed Southey's work on the same subject, and has become an English classic. Classic too, though rather through their historical than their literary merits, are the works<sup>1</sup> of Henry Hallam (1777–1859). Judicial in his method, he was a Whig at heart, and started from Whig premises. In spite of the coldness of his style and his lack of enthusiasm, his comprehensive treatment of his subject gives him rank among the great English historians. Henry Hart Milman (1791–1868) published his *History of the Jews* in 1829, and his *History of Christianity from the Birth of Christ to the Abolition of Paganism* in 1840; but his greatest and most original work, and the one in which he shook himself free from suspicion of German influence, was his *History of Latin Christianity* (1854–5). The chief work of Dr. Thomas Arnold (the great head-master of Rugby, and the father of Matthew Arnold) was his *History of Rome* (1838–43), no longer possessing authority, but notable for its qualities of style. George Grote (1794–1871) wrote his *History of Greece* in order to combat Mitford's anti-democratic conception of Greek history. He had great industry, and is still widely read, but his style is uninspired, and he has little vision. The same criticism may be made upon the *History of Greece* of Connop Thirlwall, Bishop of St. David's (1797–1875), though Thirlwall was a better scholar than Grote, and his history has a somewhat finer literary quality.

<sup>1</sup> *A View of the State of Europe during the Middle Ages* (1818); *The Constitutional History of England* (1827); *An Introduction to the Literature of Europe* (1837–9).



## CHAPTER XXVIII

## SCOTT AND THE NOVEL

The novel of sentiment and terror — Mackenzie, Walpole, Mrs. Radcliffe, Beckford — Scott and the historical novel — Jane Austen, Mrs. Gaskell, Trollope, Disraeli, Bulwer, Lever, Peacock — Minors.

As has been indicated in the foregoing chapter, the new spirit is as definitely, though perhaps not as splendidly, evident in the prose of the period as in its poetry; and in the one case, as in the other, the origins of the movement must be sought far back in the eighteenth century. As far as the novel is concerned, the spirit of the earlier age had found expression, as we have seen, in the true realism followed, after varying ways, by Richardson and Fielding, and in the burlesque realism of Smollett. Sterne's proclivity for sentiment and the exploitation of his own personality in some sense foreshadow the newer tendencies; but the most marked reaction against the older realism must be sought, not in Sterne nor in such disciples of Sterne as Mackenzie<sup>1</sup> and Henry Brooke,<sup>2</sup> but in the novel of terror originated by Horace Walpole in *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) and carried on by Mrs. Radcliffe in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1795), and other novels, and by Matthew Lewis in his miscellaneous writings, of which the chief is the celebrated *Monk*. The distinguishing feature of these novels are their addiction to horror and sensationalism, their remoteness from the setting of ordinary life and, especially in Lewis's case, their proclivity for the cruder and more obvious kinds of supernaturalism. The impulse towards the remote and fantastic appears under a different guise in *Vathek* (1783), the Eastern, or pseudo-Eastern, romance of William Beckford, the ward of Chatham, and the celebrated 'Caliph of Fonthill'. In the novels of this class, for all their crudity and anachronisms, there was a foreshadowing, if a dim and broken one, of Scott. But through the period runs a quite different strain which finds expression in the novels of Fanny Burney (*Evelina*, 1778; *Cecilia*, 1782). Owing much to Richardson in her portrayal of feminine character, she deals with English domestic life in a sprightlier, homelier, and less tragic fashion, and thus helps to fashion the form that Jane Austen was to bring to perfection. We may pass at once from the numerous minors of the period (for example, Hannah More, *Cælebs in Search of a Wife*; William Godwin, *Caleb Williams*, 1794; *St. Leon*, 1799, &c.) to him who triumphed

The Novel  
of Won-  
der.

<sup>1</sup> Author of three novels of sentiment, *The Man of Feeling* (1771), *The Man of the World* (1773), and *Julia de Roubigné* (1777); and editor in succession of *The Mirror* and *The Lounger*.

<sup>2</sup> Author of *The Fool of Quality* (1766).

over that reluctant form at which so many of his predecessors had fumbled, the English historical novel.

Scott—  
His  
Earlier  
Novels.

As we have already seen, the activity of Sir Walter Scott (1771–1832) had been diverted from poetry to prose by the growing poetic predominance of Byron. In 1814 he finished his first novel, *Waverley*, which had been commenced many years before. Its success opened his eyes to a new source of strength, and a new path to wealth and fame. Within the next six years he had published eight other novels, *Guy Mannering* (1815), *The Antiquary*, *Old Mortality*, *The Black Dwarf* (all 1816), *Rob Roy* (1817), *The Heart of Midlothian* (1818), *The Bride of Lammermoor*, *A Legend of Montrose* (both 1819), all dealing with the history of his own country during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. All of these, except perhaps *The Black Dwarf*, show him writing at his best, and amongst his greatest masterpieces must be counted *Old Mortality*, with its swift sequence of adventure, and its splendid pictures of Claverhouse and Balfour of Burleigh. *The Heart of Midlothian* is hardly less magnificent, and is memorable for its introduction of the lowly and heroic Jeanie Deans, Scott's most greatly drawn heroine.

His  
Second  
Phase.

A fresh period of his activity begins in 1819 with *Ivanhoe*, and continues through *The Monastery* and *The Abbot* (1820), *Kenilworth* and *The Pirate* (1821), *The Fortunes of Nigel* (1822), *Pevekil of the Peak*, *Quentin Durward*, *St. Ronan's Well*, *Redgauntlet* (all 1823), to *The Talisman* and *The Betrothed* (1825). In this intermediate series Scott has frequently departed from Scotland and his favourite periods of history, and has 'ransacked the ages, spoiled the climes'. He could not have given us anything better than his best early work; but he has given us more work equally good, after a slightly different kind. In *Pevekil of the Peak*, *Kenilworth*, and *The Fortunes of Nigel*, the main scene is set in England, though the last novel gives Scott a chance of developing a theme always dear to him, the play of Scottish character against English. *The Talisman* is a tale of the Crusades, *St. Ronan's Well* a study of nineteenth-century life in a Lowland watering-place. *Redgauntlet*, like *Waverley*, *Rob Roy*, and *Montrose*, contains magnificent descriptions of Scottish scenery; and it also includes that great essay in the terrible, *Wandering Willie's Tale*. The Jonsonian element in Scott, his use of the 'Comedy of Humours', the quality in him which to some seems the most precious of all, becomes less racy and less large in the novels of this period; we have wandered from the Kaim of Kinprunes, we find few fellows to Dominic Sampson and Dugald Dalgetty: but against this, we meet a host of Scott's more gravely and soberly outlined characters; Lord Crawford, Le Balafre, Varney, and George Heriot; James I and Lewis XI; Mary the Queen and Catherine Seyton. The stage is fuller and more splendid, the scenery more various and rich. Moreover, Scott's capacity for management and



construction has lost nothing of its old power: there is no greater novel of foreign history in English than *Quentin Durward*.

During his last phase Scott's genius was to a large extent thwarted by debt and ill-health: hence a certain decline in the quality of his last novels, *Woodstock* (1827), *The Fair Maid of Perth* (1828), *Anne of Geierstein* (1828-9), *Count Robert of Paris*, and *Castle Dangerous*. Yet there are splendid description and characterization even in the weakest of these, and *The Fair Maid of Perth*, with its portraits of Ramorny and Hal o' the Wynd, and the clansmen of Chattan and Quhele, contains some of his most brilliant work. All of his old power reappears in the brief sketch of Scottish life, *The Two Drovers*, which belongs also to this period.

His last phase.

The work of Scott marks one of the great epochs in English fiction. He did for the historical novel what Fielding had done for the realistic—that is to say, he first touched the form with mastery, and made it possible for his countrymen to handle it with success. His industry and rapidity of output were prodigious and Shakespearean: his thirty-one complete stories, including twenty-seven long novels, were all written within a period of sixteen years. And if he is deficient in Shakespeare's subtlety and sense of the finest issues, he resembles him again in the largeness of his sweep, in the serene impersonality of his outlook, and in the number of unforgettable figures he has given to the literature of England and the world. The spirit of his age is evident in his love of remote periods and climes, of his country's scenery in its Highland beauty and wildness, of the supernatural,<sup>1</sup> of the humour and romance which he divined in lowly lives. But if these qualities make Scott a right romantic, his romanticism is for the most part kept true and steady by his broad and virile sanity of soul. Whatever be his faults, he never shrieks in the falsetto dear to Hugo, and his greatest pages are those in which he is nearest to common life. He saw romance with the same steadiness and clearness with which Fielding saw real life; and the manliness and generosity which make him beloved as a man are evident everywhere throughout his writings.

His place among British Novelists.

It will here be convenient to say a brief word concerning the not very distinguished history of the historical novel from Scott's day onwards. His immediate successors were G. P. R. James and Harrison Ainsworth, but neither of these produced work approaching the first order. Much more important is *The Cloister and the Hearth* (1861), by Charles Reade (1814-1884), a really great historical novel, dealing with the period and family of Erasmus. Reade's chief other novels, *It is Never too Late to Mend*, *Peg Woffington*, *Christie Johnstone*, &c., belong to a different type of story and an inferior order of

Charles Reade and others.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *The Monastery*, *Anne of Geierstein*, *The Tapestry Chamber*, and for the spurious variety beloved by Mrs. Radcliffe, *Woodstock*.

merit. Conversely the historical romances of Disraeli, e.g. *Aloy*, for all their theatrical vividness and colour, certainly do not represent his best work in fiction. *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1834), *The Last of the Barons* (1843), and *Harold* (1848) are the most notable attempts in this kind of Edward George Bulwer, the first Lord Lytton (1803–1873). They display remarkable power of historical reconstruction, but Lytton's lack of spiritual depth causes him to fall short of the highest in this, as in the other literary forms which he attempted.

The Novel  
of Man-  
ners—  
Jane  
Austen.

We may turn back a few years to examine the novel of contemporary manners which, as has been noticed, had already been furthered, if not actually founded, by Fanny Burney. To this class belong the novels of Mrs. Inchbald, Robert Bage, Mrs. Opie, and other minors, of whom the chief is Maria Edgeworth (1767–1849). Her *Castle Rackrent* (1801), *The Absentee*, and *Ormond* deal with Irish society after a fairly lively fashion, though the moralizing impulse is never far distant. The novel of manners came to its perfection in the novels of Jane Austen, one of the most fastidious artists in the fiction of our own, and of any, language. That she should have been a fairly exact contemporary of Sir Walter Scott shows the remarkable range of the period, for in spirit and choice of subject the two novelists were not so much different as mutually exclusive. Jane Austen deliberately banished from her canvas every figure of humanity alien to her own time and set. 'I could no more write a romance than an epic poem,' she replied to a librarian who had unwisely suggested such a subject. 'Three or four families in a country village is the very thing to work on.' Her chief novels are *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), *Pride and Prejudice* (1812), *Mansfield Park* (1814), *Emma* (1816), *Northanger Abbey* (1818), and the posthumously published *Persuasion*. These works contain a picture drawn with the most sure and delicate shading, and coloured by a satire nowise heartless, of the world in which Miss Austen moved. Self-restricted though she was to a single social vista, she has left us a number of characters of remarkable variety and the surest individualization. We have the sensitive Marianne Dashwood and her 'sensible' sister Elinor: the masterly-drawn Bennett family, of whom the shrewd and not unkindly Elizabeth was, as we know, near to the heart and nature of Jane herself; Elizabeth's wooer, Darcy, who shows like a dim foreshadowing of Sir Willoughby Patterne, but behaves and fares better in the event: the caste-proud Bertrams, with their correct, and, to many of us, impossible, son Edmund, and their dependant, Fanny Price, much-enduring till her final triumph: that grotesque wooer and letter-writer, Mr. Collins: Emma, at first a prig and a meddler, but in the end not unloving nor unloved: Anne Elliott, dearest of all Jane Austen's women to the heart of many Austenians; and many another unforgotten figure.



Jane Austen's instinct for human nature is unerring within its own range, but, special pleading apart, it must be confessed that that range is somewhat disconcertingly limited. We need not accept wholly the valuation by which she refers to 'the little bit of ivory on which I work with so fine a brush as produces little effect after much labour'; but it is one of her own champions who says of her that 'she has little idealism, little romance, tenderness, poetry, or religion'. The indictment is a formidable one, though there would not be lacking advocates to dispute every count in it. Certainly she has not passion; she does not stir our nature to its depth as Charlotte Brontë sometimes stirs it. Her clear cool sense of life seems coldness to some, and leaves them cold in turn; but those who, like Hippolytus, are enthralled by the chaste perfection of Artemis, will find their account in Jane Austen, who holds posterity by her sure and testing touch on life, her sensitive irony, demure and inevitable dialogue, and quick, true sense of some of the most sterling things in human nature.

It will be convenient to mention here a considerably later successor to Jane Austen—Mrs. Gaskell (1810–1865), who, in *Mary Barton* (1848), takes for her subject the lower life of a great manufacturing town. In *Cranford* (1853) she adopts not only Jane Austen's manner, but her subject, and presents a subtle and delightful picture of English country life. The same field was laboured, after a very different fashion, by Anthony Trollope (1815–1882), whose *Barchester Towers* (1857) is the most famous among a numerous series of novels describing with an easy, if never quite first-rate, mastery, English country society of the middle and upper classes.

Mrs. Gaskell and Trollope.

We may turn back again to a group of novelists who came midway between Scott and Thackeray, and of whom the chief are Disraeli, Bulwer Lytton, and Peacock. Disraeli's literary activity, like the activities of Landor and Meredith, extended over more than fifty years, from *Vivian Grey* (1826) to *Endymion* (1880). Most typical of his baffling and exotic genius are the first of these novels, and *Coningsby* (1844), in which he describes, with brilliant wit and colour, the English political and aristocratic life of his day. Much of Disraeli's own political theory and ideal, much, too, of the current Tory interpretation of history, appear in these volumes. They contain, too, such powerfully drawn contemporary portraits as those of Croker (Mr. Rigby), and of the second Earl of Yarmouth (Earl Monmouth), who was later to achieve a sinister immortality as Thackeray's Lord Steyne. Disraeli, like his own Mr. Sidonia, affects a Semitic magnificence of style, and the gloss and glitter of this debar him for the most part from the highest expression. *Henrietta Temple*, however, is a charming love story, and hardly less remarkable in its different kind is *Venetia*, with its brilliant portrayal of Byron.

Disraeli.

Bulwer  
Lytton.

Bulwer's historical novels have already been noticed. He touches Disraeli both in style and in subject in his early story of English society, *Pelham* (1828). His remarkable versatility is evident in the variety of themes which he has chosen to handle in *Eugene Aram* (1832), *Zanoni* (1842), *The Caxtons* (1850), *My Novel* (1853), *The Coming Race* (1871), *Kenelm Chillingly*, and several others. His *Haunted and the Haunters* (1859) was probably the best ghost story in the English language, until Mr. Henry James wrote *The Turn of the Screw*. Bulwer, in an even greater degree than Disraeli, is liable to the charge of artistic pretence and insincerity, but this defect is to a large extent redeemed by his qualities of power and brilliancy. His exact place in literature is hardly settled even yet, but it is quite definitely below the highest.

Lever.

Charles Lever (1806-1872) is less important for his more mature and deliberate work than for the rollicking novels of his early manhood, the chief of which are *Harry Lorrequer* (1839) and *Charles O'Malley* (1841). These gay and superficial sketches of Irish life will always be read with pleasure, though they have few qualities of greatness.

Peacock.

Quite different in spirit from the three just mentioned was Thomas Love Peacock (1785-1866). Scholar, poet, and satirist, he became often an acrid critic of the Romantic movement, of which he was nevertheless a part. His criticism of this and other developments of his age appear constantly under an ironic form throughout his works, from *Headlong Hall* (1816) to *Gryll Grange* (1860). Peacock, in his most representative novels (the pair just mentioned and *Nightmare Abbey*, *Melincourt*, and *Crotchet Castle*), constantly adopts the plan of making his characters assemble in a country house, and give their opinions, often over wine and generally very wittily, upon the subjects and people whom their author most wished to satirize. This device, since practised with great effect by Mr. W. H. Mallock in *The New Republic*, gave Peacock the chance of introducing many contemporary portraits, generally coloured by a strong dash of caricature: thus, to take only a few instances, Byron appears as Mr. Cypress and Shelley as Glowry Scythrop in *Nightmare Abbey*; Coleridge, whose love of German metaphysics aroused great contempt in Peacock, is Mr. Flosky in the same novel. These novels of Peacock's, like some of Mr. Shaw's plays, subordinate action to dialogue, and often become a mere series of conversations. Somewhat different in form are *Maid Marian* (1822) and *The Misfortunes of Elphin* (1829), each of which contains an acceptable blend of irony and romance. The peculiarly detached quality of Peacock's humour makes his place in English fiction unique and assured. Minors who can merely be mentioned here are J. J. Morier (*Hajji Baba*, 1824), Michael Scott (*Tom Cringle's Log* and *The Cruise of the Midge*), Captain F. Marryat (*Peter Simple*, 1834, and *Mr. Midshipman Easy*, 1836), and Samuel Warren (*Ten Thousand a Year*, 1839).



## CHAPTER XXIX

## GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF NINETEENTH-CENTURY LITERATURE

The French Revolution and English Literature — Waning German and increasing French influence — The appeal of French poetry — Science and literature — Changed outlook of the English poets — Diversity of style and spirit in Victorian literature — Degradation of Victorian drama — Criticism and Novel-writing — The appeal of the Russian novel.

IN some ways the Victorian period of literature represents a development of the Romantic spirit, in others a definite reaction against it. By far the most important social and political influence upon the age of Wordsworth had been the new spirit of France incarnate in the Revolution. When she seemed to have betrayed the principles for which she had fought and suffered and sinned, when aggression and tyranny appeared to have succeeded equality and fraternity, the hopes entertained by many English writers for the regeneration of herself and the world vanished in disillusion and despair. Partly to this cause, partly to another immediately to be specified, is due the note of pessimism and scepticism which is already heard in Coleridge's *Ode to Dejection* and Shelley's *Lines written in Dejection near Naples*, and sounds throughout much of the English poetry which follows. But the disillusionment with France does not remain merely political: it profoundly affects the attitude of many English thinkers toward the whole French mind. Thus Coleridge, who in his youth had looked to France for salvation, can at a later period describe certain criticisms of Shakespeare as being 'not the growth of our own country but of France—the judgment of monkeys by some wonderful phenomenon put into the mouths of people shaped like men'. Even Hazlitt, who, unlike Southey and Coleridge, remained faithful to the principles of the Revolution, allows the current tendency to affect his attitude toward the French spirit, of which he writes thus: 'The French attach no importance to anything, except for the moment; they are only thinking how they shall get rid of one sensation for another: all their ideas are *in transitu*. . . They never arrive at the classical—or the romantic. They blow the bubbles of vanity, fashion, and pleasure; but they do not expand their perceptions into refinement, or strengthen them into solidity. . . They are light, airy, fanciful (to give them their due), but when they attempt to be serious (beyond mere good sense) they are either dull or extravagant.'

With this reaction against the French mind comes a corresponding enthusiasm for the German. This had already taken shape in the long visit paid by Coleridge and Wordsworth

to Germany in 1798, in Coleridge's preoccupation with German metaphysics, and in the great vogue enjoyed by the German novel of mystery. It receives a fresh lease in the writings of Carlyle, who interprets Goethe, Schiller, Richter, and Novalis to England, takes Frederick the Great for his hero, and with his admiration for the German spirit, combines a certain injustice to many French writers, including Voltaire. The German influence remains paramount in England till the day of Matthew Arnold, who, as will be seen, helps to promote it, but also holds up certain French writers to the admiration of Englishmen. From this time onwards, the influence of Germany wanes, and although the writers of her greatest period were, and still are, read with delight, her more recent literature has had comparatively little influence on English thought and art. Simultaneously with this decline, the French influence increases. With Swinburne, who is almost unaffected by the German mind, it is paramount, and otherwise than with Arnold, results in a thorough understanding of the spirit of French poetry, and the keenest enthusiasm for it. This enthusiasm has been caught and transmitted by a number of lesser men, and during the last two generations, French lyric and French drama have held a strong fascination for young imaginative England. In the case of France, then, the interest has been first and foremost literary, and has been largely concerned with the problems of form which have been faced with such splendid success by her poets. The other great foreign influence upon English poetry during this period, the Italian, has been chiefly political, and the interest has centred in the long and gallant struggle for freedom in which Italy was engaged during the early and middle periods of the nineteenth century. The tradition of responsive English enthusiasm begins as early as Shelley, and is continued in the poetry of the Brownings and Swinburne. Indeed, the Risorgimento gave something of the quickening to Victorian poetry that the Revolution had given to the earlier Romantic.

But there were other forces at play in the making of Victorian poetry, and some of these were neither literary nor political. When poetry in the Age of Wordsworth had striven to answer the central problems of life it had constantly spoken to man of a universal spirit comprising himself and nature, yet transcending space and time, a spirit in which the perplexities and tragedies of existence might be explained and reconciled. This transcendental and universalizing tendency was as strong in the 'atheist' Shelley as it was in the more orthodox Wordsworth; and it has led a great living critic to emphasize the spiritual affinity between the English poetry of this period and the German philosophy of the same, or a slightly earlier, age. But the subsequent progress of science, the establishment of the theory of evolution, and the publication of such volumes as Lyell's *Principles of Geology* (1830-3) and *The Origin of Species* (1859), sharply challenged the older philo-



sophies and faiths ; and if these were not routed, they at any rate bore upon them the marks of the onslaught, and in many cases were forced to give ground. This change of attitude is evident throughout the poetry of the period in divers forms, the most obvious of which is a certain pessimism and a certain doubt concerning the spirit of the older faith. This doubt remains unresolved in the poetry of Arnold and Clough ; in that of Tennyson, it is resolved in hope rather than in any confident or certain belief. When, as with Browning, the faith remains steady and unshaken, it has been brought down from the mountain-tops and more uniformly related to the experience of men than had been the faith of Wordsworth, and the faith, and unfaith, of Shelley. In the poetry of Francis Thompson an escape has been found through the acceptance of a revealed religion. With Swinburne and Meredith there has been a direct break with such religion, yet the faith is still intensely held and expressed ; and it is with both men a faith, whether the poet so meant it or no, which is quite in keeping with the teaching of modern science.

In point of form, the chief characteristic of Victorian and Georgian poetry is its remarkable diversity. In sharp contrast to the classic language of Arnold and Tennyson stand the intensely and sometimes perversely individual styles of Browning and Meredith. The elaborate and often exquisite ' conceits ' of Francis Thompson are frequently reminiscent of Donne, and the rich sensuousness of his language gives him kinship with Crashaw. Sensuous after a different fashion is Rossetti's poetry, ' a box where sweets compacted lie '. William Morris, on the other hand, who distrusts the Renaissance, and strives to recapture the spirit of the Middle Age, ensues in his poetry the large and simple speech of his master Chaucer. The main influences on the younger men would appear to be Coleridge and Blake, though one of the chief poets now living has expressly deprecated Blake's influence, and has professed his allegiance to Dryden and Gray. At certain periods of English literature—notably in the first half of the eighteenth century—it has been possible to point to a given form or style of writing, and to describe it as typical of the age. This would be utterly impossible with the Victorian period, which both in practice and in theory would seem to be the most various age of English literature.

There has been hardly less variety in English criticism ; and the tendency here has been accompanied by a growing and wholesome catholicity. Almost every period of England's literary past, almost every great foreign literature, has found its admirers and champions. Ruskin and Morris, after widely different fashions, have helped to bring the spirit of the Middle Ages into touch with modern English thought and art. Swinburne, Symonds, and many lesser writers, through their enthusiasm for Elizabethan drama, have kept alive the national interest in the finest flower of the English

Renaissance. The Romantics are always with us, and our delight in them has never waned; but while their greatness has been taken for granted by the finest critics of the Victorian period, many of their prejudices have been discarded, and a notable instance of the growing tendency toward breadth and tolerance may be seen in the gradual mellowing of men's attitude toward the eighteenth century. The poets of that century had met with scant justice from the age of Wordsworth. To-day, however, the balance has been redressed. Never has Johnson received finer praise and understanding than have been given to him by certain living critics. The poetry of Pope, which had been savagely attacked by Keats and others of his day, has been interpreted with fine scholarship and sympathy by such scholars as the late W. J. Courthope; and a number of other writers, of whom the chief was perhaps Sir Leslie Stephen, have helped in diverse fashions to revivify the life and form and colour of the period. Despite the frequent perversity of many of Matthew Arnold's judgments, much of this wider understanding and sympathy must be attributed to his teaching and example. He had always attacked 'provincialism' in criticism, as elsewhere, and had encouraged the critic to take his standards from the highest, and, in formulating his judgments, to ensue the 'sweetness and light' which to Arnold seemed a first condition of all civilized life and thought. He had blamed the critics of his day for their deficiencies both of sympathy and knowledge. It may perhaps be claimed, without undue complacency, that since he wrote, English criticism has in large measure made good both these defects, and that it can now hold its own even with the work of the French critics to whose example Arnold so constantly referred it. If the Victorian age has not produced much great criticism it has at any rate produced a very great deal of true and fine criticism; it is doubtful, indeed, whether in any previous period the general level has been higher. Nor has the critical standard been lowered during the Georgian period; and this is all the more satisfactory, since that period has been by no means rich in creative work of the first order.

In drama the condition of affairs is much less encouraging. The divorce between literature and the stage, indicated in an earlier chapter, has remained all but absolute. The few exceptions will be noted in their place. The Repertory Theatre movement, which has done something to redeem the English stage from this disgrace, cannot be discussed here, as most of its leaders are happily still alive.

The Victorian novel displays the same variety that we have already noticed in Victorian poetry. During the early part of this period Dickens, with his exuberant imagination, his love of romantic colour and realistic detail, and his all-embracing sympathies, stands in sharp contrast to the curbed and cynical, yet most powerful, genius of Thackeray. Of the two



Dickens has had by far the greater influence upon succeeding novelists ; indeed, the modern English novel of contemporary middle-class life and manners derives from him, and shows signs of his practice both in obvious and subtle ways. Since his day the tendency of the realistic novel in England has been increasingly toward bringing character and plot into touch with the social problems of the period, and the large questions of national life. George Meredith, the third great novelist of the period who falls within the scope of this volume, exhibits differences from both Thackeray and Dickens which strikingly illustrate the diversity of the age. The chief characteristics of his thought and art will be discussed in their place. His intensely personal style is characteristic of a tendency which will be discussed later in relation to the poetry of Robert Browning.

From the beginning of the Victorian period onwards, the French novel has been widely read in England, and its greatest practitioners, Balzac, Hugo, Stendhal, Flaubert, and Maupassant, have had a definite, if not always obvious, influence upon the practice of English novelists. During the last generation the Russian novel has taken a remarkable hold upon the imagination both of English readers and writers. The earliest influence here had been Tolstoy, whose *Anna Karenina* was praised by Matthew Arnold in a thoughtful and illuminating essay. Later, men were captivated by the artistry and humanism of Turgenev. The most recent, and probably the most potent, influence of all has been that of Dostoievsky, whose intense imaginative power, and combination of idealistic conviction with unflinching realism, have had a profound effect upon the younger generation. The mark of Dostoievsky is strongly evident in the work of certain younger English novelists ; but the foreign influences on the English novel of the last century have been superficial only ; its main development has been native and individual, and for force and variety it can hold its own with any other English form of the period.

## CHAPTER XXX

### POETS OF THE TRANSITION

Religious poetry — Clare, Hartley Coleridge, Hawker, Darley, Beddoes, de Vere, Taylor, Horne, and others — The 'Spasmodics'.

SOME of the general tendencies just noted are already Religious evident in certain poets of the transition whom we may Poetry. briefly mention before passing to the greater poets of the Victorian period. The age was prolific in religious verse, and in this relation we may record the names of James and Robert Montgomery and Henry Kirke White (1785-1806), who need not otherwise detain us here. On a higher level is Reginald

Heber, Bishop of Calcutta (1783–1826), who wrote many fine hymns and a prize poem, *Palestine*, worthy to rank in excellence with that other prize poem of Milman's, the *Apollo Belvedere*. Another writer of fine hymns is John Keble (1792–1866), author of *The Christian Year* and *Lyra Innocentium* (1846). The religious verse of John Henry Newman is small in quantity but of fine quality. Some of his greatest work appears in his long poem, *The Dream of Gerontius*; his most beautiful hymn is *Lead, Kindly Light*.

Clare and others.

To a different order belongs the farmer poet, John Clare (1793–1864), author of *Poems Descriptive of Rural Life* (1820), *The Village Minstrel* (1821), and *The Shepherd's Calendar* (1827). Clare's life, like Christopher Smart's, ended in a form of insanity which seemed rather to heighten than to diminish his poetic power. His greatest lyric, 'I am! yet what I am who cares or knows?' was written in the Northamptonshire County Asylum. Barry Cornwall (Bryan Waller Procter) deserves mention rather for his literary friendships than for his literary achievement. Ebenezer Elliott (1781–1849), the 'Anti-Corn Law Rhymers', lives through the vigorous *Battle Song* in which he rallies the workers to the fight for freedom. Thomas Babington Macaulay's *Lays of Ancient Rome* (1842) have been decried by the fastidious from Matthew Arnold onwards, and are read by every one. Forceful and flowing, they are as emphatically a kind of poetry as they are emphatically no high kind. Balladists of lesser standing are William Edmondstone Aytoun (1813–1865—*Lays of the Scottish Cavaliers*, 1848) and Francis Hastings Doyle (1810–1888), best known by his spirited *Private of the Buffs* and *Red Thread of Honour*. Winthrop Mackworth Praed (1802–1839) wrote consummate *vers de société*, mainly jocular, as in *A Letter from Teignmouth*, but sometimes suffused with deeper sentiment, as in his masterpiece, *The Vicar*. His *Red Fisherman* is a brilliant essay in the grimly humorous.

Barnes.

William Barnes (1801–1886), Vicar of Carne in Dorsetshire, wrote in the dialect of that county lyrics of a peculiarly English simplicity and sweetness, which appeal to most readers of our own day as strongly as they did to the peasants who originally heard them read aloud. In such poems as *True Love* and *Jessie Lee*, he sets the Dorset Doric, as Burns had set the Scotch, to express an elemental theme, and the result is exquisite. Hardly less exquisite is *My Orchard in Linden Lea*, with its perfectly handled refrain. *Blackmores Maidens* has a more playful charm. One of Barnes's most beautiful poems is the rhymeless *In the Spring*. James Clarence Mangan (1803–1849), in right of *My Dark Rosaleen* and other of his lyrics, must be counted a forerunner, and no mean one, of the modern Celtic school. The amiable and unfortunate Hartley Coleridge (1796–1849) was the son of S. T. Coleridge, and the friend and admirer of Wordsworth and Tennyson. His touch on the lyric and the longer poem

Hartley Coleridge.



was uncertain; but he has left several sonnets of the first order. Best of all, perhaps, are the self-confessional, such as 'When I review the course that I have run'.

Robert Stephen Hawker (1803-1875), 'Hawker of Morwen-Hawker. stow', was a poet of considerable power who drew for many of his themes upon the legends, adventures, and memories of his Cornish parish. His short and powerful *Death-Song of Harold* celebrates the tragedy of the Battle of Camlan. He was always greatly attracted by religious legend, and has woven it into poetry in *The Legend of St. Thekla* and *The Bier of Mary, Mother of God*. More generally known is his *Song of the Western Men*, with its admirably counterfeited air of antiquity. Perhaps his most beautiful poem is *King Arthur's Waes-Hael*.

A true and exquisite vein of poetry runs through the best work of George Darley (1795-1846). His fairy play, *Sylvia* (1827), is full of broken light and music. He had not the strength and restraint to write a long poem of sustained excellence, but the fitful beauty of *Sylvia* is recaptured in the unfinished *Nepenthe* (1839), which contains snatches of perfect poetry. Some of Darley's lyrics—notably 'Sweet in her green cell the flower of beauty slumbers'—are perfect in their kind.

Even rarer quality is evident in the best work of Thomas Beddoes. Contemporary, Thomas Lovell Beddoes (1803-1849). Though his conscious desire from the beginning was for the dramatic, his true genius was for the lyric. He had little or no constructive power. His first book, *The Improvisatore, in Three Fyttes, with other Poems* (1821), was published while he was an Oxford freshman. *The Bride's Tragedy* (1822) followed while he was still an undergraduate, and won him the praise of Darley. But his most notable work was *Death's Jest Book, or The Fool's Tragedy*, published by his friend Kelsall, in the year after Beddoes had died by his own hand in Germany. The play is mediaeval in subject and spirit, and its chaotic wildness suggests the influence of Tieck and the German romanticists, whom Beddoes greatly admired. Much of its blank verse is of great beauty, and it contains some delightful lyrics, including 'If thou wilt ease thy heart' and the admirably *macabre*.

Old Adam, the carrion crow,  
The old crow of Cairo.

Beddoes left fragments of several other plays; many of his lyrics, such as *Dream-Pedlary* and the Song from *Torrismond* ('How many times do I love thee, dear?'), rank little below the highest.

The poetic or romantic prose drama, which had been the chief glory of our literature, was attempted by many at this period. Sir Aubrey de Vere (1788-1846), a true poet and the father of a true poet, wrote several plays in blank verse, including *Julian the Apostate* (1822), *The Duke of Mercia* (1823), and *Mary Tudor*. The last of these, and the finest, was written in the last year of his life. Sir Henry Taylor (1800-1886) was

the author of *Isaac Comnenus* (1827), *The Virgin Widow* (1849), and the far more famous *Philip van Artevelde* (1834), a poetic drama of high and serious purpose, which was welcomed by the discerning of its day, and retains a place of high honour. Thomas Noon Talfourd (1795–1854), a distinguished lawyer, the close friend of Charles Lamb, and an early champion of Wordsworth, is chiefly remembered by his classical drama *Ion* (1836), in which the austere splendour of *Philip van Artevelde* shines with diminished lustre. The plays of Bulwer Lytton possess a kind of merit which is rather theatrical than literary. His admirers claim that there must needs be something in dramas which, like *The Lady of Lyons* (1838), *Richelieu* (1839), and *Money* (1840), have held the stage for nearly a hundred years. Equally successful in their day, but of far less permanent appeal, are the plays of James Sheridan Knowles (1784–1862), *Virginius* (1820), *The Hunchback* (1832), *The Love Chase* (1837), and several others. If Knowles's plays were theatrically successful but deficient in true literary quality, the converse is the case with *Cosmo de Medici* and *The Death of Marlowe* (both 1837) by Richard Hengist Horne. These plays, though very unequal, contain much fine work; yet Horne's most notable production was no drama, but *Orion, an Epic Poem in Three Books*, an allegory designed, as he has told us, 'to present a type of the struggles of man with himself, i.e. the contest between the intellect and the senses'. Its blank verse is touched with fire and passion, and the poem, though deficient in action, is lit with a great spiritual idea. Of equally high aim, of less consistent merit, and of vast length, is the *Festus* (1839) of Philip James Bailey, designed, so its author tells us, 'as a summary of the world's combined moral and physical conditions, estimated on a theory of spiritual things'.

The 'Spasmodics'.

The nickname 'Spasmodics' was originally given to a certain group of poets by W. E. Aytoun, who parodied in *Firmilian* (1854) the qualities, good and bad, which he attributed to them. Chief among them were Sydney Dobell (1824–1874) and Alexander Smith (1830–1867). The word 'spasmodic' suggests the extravagance and incoherence which is common to their work; yet that work was frequently illumined by passion and inspiration. The first volume to bring Dobell fame was the dramatic poem, *The Roman* (1850), written in a fervour of enthusiasm for Italian freedom. More profound and philosophic in its aim was the unfinished and most unequal *Balder* (1854), designed, so its author tells us, to trace 'the progress of a Human Being from Doubt to Faith, from Chaos to Order'. Far more generally read than either of these are Dobell's best sonnets—many of which were inspired by the Crimean War—and his strangely beautiful ballad, *Keith of Ravelston*. The best poetry of his friend, Alexander Smith, is to be found in *Poems* (1853), *City Poems* (1857), and *Edwin of Deira* (1861), though the charming prose essays entitled *Dreamthorp* (1863)



are probably more generally read than any of these. He has left some fine sonnets; and his *Glasgow* is a splendid poem, written in praise of a city which has received few tributes in song.

Of less importance are Richard Harris Barham (1788–1845), whose *Ingoldsby Legends* (1837) are cunningly rhymed masterpieces in the grotesque; and Richard Monckton Milnes, Lord Houghton (1805–1885), the friend of Tennyson, the Mr. Vavasour of Disraeli's *Tancred*, and critic, poet, and one of the great social figures of his day.

## CHAPTER XXXI

### VICTORIAN POETRY

Tennyson, the Brownings, Swinburne, William Morris, Rossetti, James Thomson, FitzGerald, Matthew Arnold, Clough, Christina Rossetti, Patmore, O'Shaughnessy, Francis Thompson, Henley, Wilde, Davidson, Brooke.

WHEN we pass from the poets of the transition, the first great name we encounter is that of Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809–1892), who represents at once a development of the earlier Romanticism and a notable reaction against it. Much even of his earlier poetry displays a richness and sensuous beauty of colour which puts him in close touch with Keats. In 1829 he won the Chancellor's prize at Cambridge with his poem *Timbuctoo*; in 1830 appeared his *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical*. Most of these, as *Oriana* and *The Mermaid*, display a certain wistfulness of cadence and feeling, combined with a strong and sometimes exaggerated sense of the value of detail in the creation of beauty. Tennyson's touch on poetry is here faltering and uncertain: it has become far surer in *The Lady of Shalott and Other Poems* (1832), which contained, besides the name-poem, such master's work as *Oenone*, *The Palace of Art*, *The Lotus-Eaters*, and *A Dream of Fair Women*. *The Lady of Shalott*, a symbolic rehandling of the tale of Lancelot and Elaine, is his first, and one of his most beautiful, essays in the Arthurian Legend, which he subsequently wished to compress within the compass of a musical masque, and eventually developed more fittingly in *The Idylls of the King*. *The Two Voices*, and, to some extent, *The Palace of Art*, display in a form tinged with youthful despondency, that eager questioning of life which was later to take more virile and various shape in the great fabric of *In Memoriam*. The poems of 1832, although they were savagely and unwisely attacked in certain quarters, immediately won for Tennyson the consideration of some of the most representative minds of his day, including natures so diverse as Carlyle, FitzGerald, and John Stuart Mill.

Tennyson  
—Early  
Poems.

No further volume was published till the year 1842, which saw the production of two volumes, *English Idylls* and *Enoch Arden and Other Poems*. These represent a notable development in Tennyson's genius, for in the words of his biographer and son, 'there was now a marvellous abatement of my father's real fault—the tendency, arising from the fullness of a mind which had not learnt to master its resources freely, to overcrowd his compositions with imagery, to which may be added over-indulgence in the luxury of the senses'. *Morte d'Arthur*, subsequently to be developed into *The Passing of Arthur*, shows Tennyson's mind strongly at work on Malory and the older Arthurian romances. *Ulysses*, *Tithonus*, and *Lucretius* display his growing mastery of blank verse, together with that high and Vergilian dignity of expression and acute sensitiveness to all beauty of form and feeling, which, in combination, make him one of the chief English inheritors of the classical spirit. *Locksley Hall* represents the old wistfulness and disillusion which were to recur in *Maud* and to be partially resolved in *In Memoriam*.

*The Princess.*

*The Princess*, a lengthy 'blank verse lyric'—to use Tennyson's own term for it—on the subject of Woman's Rights, was originally published in 1847, but is now chiefly prized for the exquisite incidental lyrics which were added to it in 1850.

*In Memoriam.*

*In Memoriam*, published in 1850, had been begun in 1833, the year which had seen the death of Arthur Hallam, the gifted and well-beloved friend whose memory it celebrates. Full of vivid scenery and portraiture, and containing passages of perfect lyric beauty, it ranks with *Lycidas* and *Adonais* as one of the classic elegies in our language, and is also a great autobiographical and philosophic poem. It shows a human soul at handgrips with the deepest and darkest problems of life, and embodies the attitude towards religion not only of a man but of a whole generation. A comparison between it and *The Prelude* shows clearly how far Tennyson has moved from Wordsworth's envisagement of Nature, and how strongly his outlook has been coloured by the age in which he wrote—the age of Lyell and Darwin and Huxley. Huxley, indeed, remarked of him that he was the first poet since Lucretius who had taken the trouble to understand the scientific point of view; and his conception of Nature as 'red in tooth and claw', like the intuition of her embodied in Arnold's *Sonnet to a Preacher*, agrees with Huxley<sup>1</sup> in regarding her as a ruthless force who was not the ally but the foe of the human soul in its striving for spiritual and physical salvation. We are a far way here from the conception of her as Healer and Revealer embodied in the *Lines Written above Tintern Abbey*. Yet Tennyson, despite his moods of black despondency, does not, like Vigny, despair utterly of Nature and of life, but pours forth in poignant language the aspiration of his soul for some

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Huxley's Romanes Lecture on *Evolution and Ethics*.



form of spiritual existence which shall transcend the present order, and enable him to regain his friend. Some, especially those of the younger generation, have found the philosophy and faith of *In Memoriam* commonplace and unsatisfying, and certainly Wordsworth scaled spiritual heights on whose foot-hills Tennyson had barely trod; but no dissatisfaction of this kind can be allowed to discount the superb beauty of description and reminiscence which runs throughout the poem.

In 1855 Tennyson published *Maud*, a lyric romance embodying a psychology essentially modern. Both the characterization and the lyric expression of this poem are uneven, and the invective against society with which it opens is overwrought and rhetorical, for Tennyson's gloom nowhere achieves the cosmic sublimity of Vigny's or Leopardi's; but there is much fine work in *Maud*, and critics should never forget that the very strain in it which some of them denounce as 'morbid', produced one at least of the loveliest lyrics that Tennyson ever wrote.

*Maud.*

In *The Idylls of the King* Tennyson recurs to the theme which had attracted him strongly both before and after the publication of *Sir Lancelot and Guinevere* and *The Lady of Shalott*. The series began with the beautiful *Morte d'Arthur*, which was written before 1835, originally published in 1842 as one of the *English Idylls*, and republished as the conclusion of *The Idylls of the King* under the name of *The Passing of Arthur*. Fresh idylls appeared at intervals from 1859 (*Enid, Vivien, Elaine, and Guinevere*) to 1885 (*Balin and Balan*). In its final form, the series comprises twelve tales of the Round Table, each written in blank verse. In the main Tennyson keeps to the version of Malory with recourse to the *Mabinogion* and such early romances as the metrical *Morte Arthure*; but he has freely remoulded the old legends to the shape and fashion of his formidably decorous age, and it must frankly be confessed that much of the glamour of Malory has vanished in the process. Nowhere is this more lamentably the case than in *Guinevere*, where the queen's guilty yet heroic love for her knight dwindles at the end into a half-hearted reversion to her sermonizing lord and king, and thus prevents Tennyson from portraying the far more beautiful and spiritual renunciation-scene between Lancelot and Guinevere, which, as described by Malory, is one of the greatest passages in English prose. In *The Last Tournament*, again, Tennyson adopts the less poetic and tragic version of Tristram's death, and altogether fails to do justice to the spirit of the old romance. Yet, despite all objections—and many more might be added—the *Idylls* are not ignobly conceived or wrought, and, at their best, as in *The Passing of Arthur*, they contain work inferior to nothing in Tennyson.

*The Idylls of the King.*

In 1850 Tennyson was made Laureate in succession to Wordsworth, and in 1852 he wrote his first official ode of importance,

His later Poems.

that *On the Death of the Duke of Wellington*. From now onwards he continued to publish at intervals such patriotic poems as *The Charge of the Light Brigade* and *The Defence of Lucknow*, the best of which are spirited and stirring. Probably his finest achievement in this kind is *The Revenge, a Ballad of the Fleet*, which follows and sometimes, though by no means always, betters the splendid prose narrative of Raleigh.

A quite different handling is evident in Tennyson's poems of pastoral life, some of which, as *The Northern Farmer*, are written in dialect, others, as *The May Queen*, in ordinary English. A powerful tragic poem in this class is *Rizpah*, which received the passionate praise of Swinburne. Certain of Tennyson's other poems, as *Locksley Hall Sixty Years After* and *Vastness*, embody a deepening and a variation of the faith of *In Memoriam*, and a still keener sense of the poignant antinomy between faith and science.

His Plays.

Of his plays the most important are *Queen Mary* (1875), *Harold* (1876), *Becket* (1879), *The Falcon* and *The Cup* (1884). The first three of these represent an attempt to revive the old English history play, and to make it hold the English stage, which, except for a few brief revivals, had hardly known it since the day of Elizabeth. Both *Harold* and *Becket* contain fine character drawing: *Becket* is strongly dramatic. Had Tennyson begun to write poetic drama in his prime he might have done very great things indeed.

Browning  
—*Pauline*  
and *Paracelsus*.

With Tennyson the writing of plays came late, and was induced by his practice of the dramatic poem. With Robert Browning (1812–1889) the sequence is reversed; his dramas come early, and it is only after passing from them to the dramatic poem that he achieves his full strength. It is noteworthy, too, that whereas much of Tennyson's best work—for instance, *In Memoriam*—is personal and confessional, *Pauline* (1833), which is Browning's earliest publication, and is described by him as a 'fragment of a confession', represents a way of writing to which he seldom returned. Dramatic in form, it is really an essay in self-revelation; and self-revelation, at least of the direct variety, subsequently became distasteful to him. *Pauline* shows the influence of Shelley, whom it praises as the 'Sun-treader'. *Paracelsus* (1835) is a far greater achievement. It is a study in the character of the famous sixteenth-century Swiss philosopher and charlatan, who, as recreated by Browning, finds after years of intellectual striving that his life has been thwarted through lack of the human charity and love vouchsafed to his friend, the poet Aprile. This early poem foreshadows Browning's later practice of developing a great conception through the workings of a human soul. The central idea itself, and Paracelsus's conviction that the struggle of his earthly life will find fruition in a future state, also anticipate much that was to come in Browning's later work. This splendid poetic dialogue is an astonishing production for a man of twenty-three. *Sordello*, though it did not appear till 1840, was conceived and partially written

*Sordello*.



before the publication of *Paracelsus*. It deals with the life-tragedy of the young Guelf poet whose name it bears, and shows the ideal triumphing over ambition, though at the cost of life itself. It is one of the most difficult among English poems, yet contains passages of great beauty.

In 1837 Browning's first play, *Strafford*, was produced by Macready at Covent Garden, but only ran for five nights. Browning was not disheartened, and during the next eight years produced six fresh dramas, *King Victor and King Charles* (1842), *The Return of the Druses* (1843), *A Blot in the 'Scutcheon* (1843), *Colombe's Birthday* (1844), *Luria* and *A Soul's Tragedy* (1846). None of these plays has had any striking success on the stage, though the most popular of them, *A Blot in the 'Scutcheon*, has been occasionally revived. If their failure proves that Browning had an imperfect mastery of the theatrical, it also suggests that early Victorian audiences had an imperfect sense of the dramatic. The plays, it must be admitted, are too wordy, and in some cases they elaborate character to the detriment of plot; yet Henry and Mildred, Djabal and Anael, the tragic lovers of *A Blot in the 'Scutcheon* and *The Return of the Druses*, might well appear dramatic even beneath the cheap scrutiny of the limelight. Less able to bear this test, but secure by every higher one, is the exquisitely idealized figure of Luria; and the plays contain other unforgettable characters, such as Colombe and Chiappino, whose story, like his life, has its first half poetry and its second prose.

Somewhat apart from the plays proper lies *Pippa Passes*—a set of dramatic scenes showing how the song of a passing girl, who is enjoying a holiday from her task work, enters and alters the lives of those who hear it. *Pippa* contains some perfect poetry, and one, at least, of the most dramatic passages ever penned by Browning. In this class, too, may be reckoned *In a Gondola* (1842) and the later *In a Balcony*, dramatic dialogues which contain some of Browning's greatest lyric and tragic work. But if his genius was intensely dramatic, it was also, in the strength of its ethical and metaphysical conviction, intensely self-conscious; hence his perfect form of expression was not the dramatic dialogue, which curbs self-consciousness, but the dramatic monologue or lyric, which gives it freer play. Browning had already attempted this form in two volumes, *Dramatic Lyrics* (1842) and *Dramatic Romances and Lyrics* (1845), which, with his six plays, complete the full series of *Bells and Pomegranates*, and contain such splendid work as *Porphyria's Lover*, *Waring*, *The Flight of the Duchess*, and the first draft of *Saul*. They were followed by *Christmas Eve and Easter Day* (1850), which discusses the human and superhuman truths underlying orthodox religion; and by *Men and Women* (1855), which, with *Dramatis Personae* (1864) and *The Ring and the Book* (1868-69), represents the finest flower of Browning's achievement. The first two volumes

His Plays.

His great dramatic Poems.

consist mainly of dramatic poems of short or medium length. Some of these, for example, *How they brought the good News*, *Count Gismond*, and *The Glove*, are simply spirited stories in verse. Others, as *In a Laboratory*, *The Heretic's Tragedy*, *The Worst of It*, *How it strikes a Contemporary*, *Bishop Blougram*, *The Bishop at St. Praxed's*, *The Grammarian's Funeral*, are first and foremost studies in character, sinister or simple, worldly or heavenly; but more characteristic of Browning's genius, and containing all its highest qualities, are *Cleon*, *An Epistle of Karshish*, *Andrea del Sarto*, *Abt Vogler*, *Evelyn Hope*, *Rabbi Ben Ezra*, *The Last Ride Together*, and *Holy-Cross Day*, in which he uses the dramatic form for the expression of a great central idea which he either accepts himself or regards with interest and sympathy. Browning's 'men and women' are of all periods, countries, faiths, and characters; but the period to which he returns most eagerly is the Renaissance, and the country he loves above all others is Italy, where he had lived so long and happily, and to which he devoted the lyric praise of *An Englishman in Italy*, *An Italian in England*, and *De Gustibus*.

His philo-  
sophy  
and faith.

Browning's range of character was vast and various; yet there are two kinds of character to whom he recurs with special frequency and gusto: full-blooded or inquisitive folk of the Renaissance time or type, to whom he was drawn by his own insatiable zest of life and beauty; and beings representing a thwarted life or faith or art, whom he envisaged as seeking beyond this life the realization of their hands' striving or their soul's yearning. The creation of these latter types enabled him to express some of his own most fervidly held beliefs. Chief among these was the conviction that human life, its aspirations and its failures, could only be understood and explained by the light of the Christian revelation, and by the assumption that the life of this world is not the end, but the beginning, of human self-realization. This belief is attested by the pagan in *Cleon* and *An Epistle of Karshish*, by the Jew in *Saul*, the apostle in *A Death in the Desert*, the lover in *Evelyn Hope* and *The Last Ride Together*, the sage in *Rabbi Ben Ezra*, and the artist and musician in *Andrea del Sarto* and *Abt Vogler*. The conviction, however, that perfect self-realization is only possible in the hereafter, was not based in Browning's case, as it was in Carlyle's, on a gloomy intuition of earthly existence; on the contrary, he held that this life 'means intensely and means good', and he gloried in its very imperfections, taking his joy of souls whose yearning soared beyond their achievement,<sup>1</sup> and of works of art where mechanical technique fell maimed and broken before the mightiness of spiritual aspiration.<sup>2</sup> Conversely, he often expresses distrust of lives or works distinguished by a finite

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *The Grammarian's Funeral*.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Old Pictures in Florence*.



perfection. 'What's come to perfection perishes', he tells us in *Old Pictures in Florence*. Failure and suffering and sin were the necessary conditions of good; they would be further atoned and explained by a fuller understanding of that spirit of love which with Browning, as with Shelley, was the moving force of the universe.

Browning's greatest work of all, and probably the greatest work of later Victorian poetry, is *The Ring and the Book*. Its subject, a seventeenth-century Italian murder-case, was furnished to him in the 'square old yellow book' which he picked up at a second-hand bookstall in Florence. Its central figures are the murderer, Count Guido Franceschini, his victim, the girl-wife Pompilia, and the priest, Caponsacchi, who worshipped her with a pure and devoted love. Her girlhood and marriage, her husband's unbearable cruelty, her flight, Guido's pursuit, the selfless devotion of Caponsacchi, her murder, and Guido's trial, make up the themes of the ten monologues into which the poem falls. Its greatness depends largely on the technical device by which the action and chief characters are reviewed from different standpoints in the successive books by the characters themselves, by the chatty Roman cits, by the advocates on each side, and by the Pope himself. Guido is as tense and perfect a study in evil as any in our literature; and that literature possesses few more exquisite and moving heroines than Pompilia, the 'perfect in whiteness'. Never did Browning show greater psychological mastery than in his drawing of the major and minor characters in this poem.

Browning's remaining works<sup>1</sup> represent a huge output. There is much beauty in *Balaustion's Adventure*, with its transcript from Euripides, which is Browning's translation of the *Alcestis*. *Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau* is a dramatic re-valuation of Napoleon the Third's character. *The Inn Album* is a powerful study in the sinister, and resembles a novel by Mr. Henry James done into verse. *La Saisiaz* is final as an exposition of Browning's faith in immortality, but is anything but final or satisfying in point of poetic form. The rest can receive no further mention here.

Browning, like Meredith, has an intensely personal style, and of each writer it may be said that 'you must love him ere to you he will seem worthy of your love'. The day is long past of that criticism which 'blames' him because his style is 'grotesque'; it is realized that in the might of that 'grotesquerie' he has written such masterpieces as *A Heretic's Tragedy*.

<sup>1</sup> *Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau* and *Balaustion's Adventure* (1871), *Fifine at the Fair* (1872), *Red Cotton Night-cap Country* (1873), *Aristophanes' Apology* and *The Inn Album* (1875), *Paëchiarotto* (1876), *The Agamemnon of Aeschylus* (1877), *La Saisiaz* and *The Two Poets of Croisic* (1878), *Dramatic Idylls, First and Second Series* (1879 and 1880), *Jocoseria* (1883), *Ferishtah's Fancies* (1884), *Parleyings with Certain People of Importance* (1887), and *Asolando* (1889).

and *Caliban upon Setebos*. With him too the grotesque, at its best, passes constantly into beauty, as in *A Grammarian's Funeral* and *Holy-Cross Day*; and frequently the mastery which he achieves is not grotesque at all, but becomes the classic and final beauty of *Saul*. His style, like that of any other great artist, must be appraised by the law of its own being and by none other, and approved if it reaches the highest pitch which that law allows. Often, especially in his later work, it fails of that pitch, whereof come wordiness and contortion; yet there are few modern poets who have put forth a greater volume of great work than Robert Browning.

Swin-  
burne—  
Early  
Plays and  
Poems.

Algernon Charles Swinburne (1837–1909) represents the working of new forces, both in thought and in expression. Educated at Eton and, under Jowett, at Balliol, he early developed that love of learning, and that mastery of classical scholarship, which colour all his work, and make him one of the most erudite among English poets. His earliest volume consisted of two plays, *The Queen Mother* and *Rosamond* (1860); but it was his Greek tragedy, *Atalanta in Calydon* (1865), which first showed men that he was a great poet. Instead of the dead and faithful rhymeless choruses of Arnold's *Merope*, Swinburne employed rhymed lyric measures of surpassing beauty, and imparted the same beauty and a joyous eager might to the blank verse in which he retold the ancient tale of the Calydonian boar-hunt. This drama, and the perhaps slightly less great *Erechtheus* (1876), stand apart among Swinburne's dramas as being Greek in subject, and, to some extent, in structure and spirit. *Poems and Ballads* (1866) won him further fame, and in many quarters, owing to their occasional eroticism, a certain notoriety. This volume contains some of his very greatest poems—including the *Hymn to Proserpine*, *In Memory of Walter Savage Landor*, and the glorious *Triumph of Time*. Its distinguishing qualities are its passionate adoration of sensuous beauty, and its subtlety and might of lyric expression. The same might and passion are present in *Songs before Sunrise* (1871), but are now devoted to the cause of liberty, and, in especial, to the great cause of Italian liberty, which Swinburne, like Meredith and the Brownings, had deeply at heart. The youthful phase of world-weariness which had appeared in poems like *The Garden of Proserpine* and *Ex Voto*, had now passed away, to reappear but seldom in Swinburne's poetry, and had given place to a fervent belief in the spirit of man, and in his right to vindicate that spirit against the kings and creeds which would mar the joy and glory of his spiritual growth. Thus he sings in *Hertha*:

A creed is a rod  
And a crown is of night,  
But this thing is God  
To be man with thy might,

To grow straight in the strength of thy spirit, and live out thy life as  
the light.



In *The Hymn of Man* we find the thought, so insistent in Shelley, that the soul of man has power to tame the universe and penetrate its furthest recesses :

His thought takes flight for the centre wherethrough it hath part in  
the whole,

The abysses forbid it not enter : the stars make room for the soul.

Space is the soul's to inherit ; the night is hers as the day ;

Lo, saith man, this is my spirit : how shall not the worlds make way ?

Much of *Songs before Sunrise* is politics ; but it is politics lit with the lyric glory of *The Halt before Rome*, *Messidor*, and *The Litany of Nations* ; and Swinburne's passion for righteousness takes a form of perfect and balanced beauty in *Genesis* and *The Pilgrims*.

From this time onwards there are two main notes in Swinburne's song. One is his love of beauty for beauty's sake, the desire to sing for the joyous or passionate sake of singing. This finds utterance pre-eminently in *Poems and Ballads*, Second and Third Series (1878 and 1889), *Studies in Song* (1880), and *A Century of Roundels* (1883), and results in such masterpieces as *The Forsaken Garden*, *Relics*, and the superb *Choriambics*. On the other hand, his passionate ethical impulse and love of freedom find expression in the *Songs of Two Nations*, and reappear once more toward the end in *The Altar of Righteousness*. This love of freedom never failed in Swinburne, and is traceable in his latest work ; but side by side with it there gradually grew in him a not less passionate nationalism, born of the conviction that his country was one in which the spirit of freedom had become incarnate. This belief was enshrined in a series of patriotic poems such as *The Armada*, *A Word for the Navy*, *Trafalgar Day*, and *The Commonweal* ; and in the *Ode to Athens*, whose concluding stanzas contain some splendid praise of England. Swinburne's exultation in Britain's historic glory is interwoven with two of his other main enthusiasms—his eager delight in the sea, the element of freedom and might with which he conceived England to have special kinship ; and his undying love of the literature of England, which he knew so intimately, and has hymned so nobly in such poems as *In the Bay*, and his sonnets on the Elizabethan dramatists. Some of his greatest poetry is written in praise of poets : in *Ave atque Vale* (his elegy on Baudelaire), the *Memorial Verses to Théophile Gautier*, and his apostrophes to Hugo and Walter Savage Landor, he has expressed his hero-worship lyrically and rhapsodically, yet with penetrating critical insight.

Swinburne's two Arthurian poems, *Tristram of Lyonesse* (1882) and *The Tale of Balen* (1896), differ considerably from one another in form and handling. Considered simply as a story, the latter, partly by virtue of its swinging and echoing stanza, is more successful and direct, but it cannot vie in passion and beauty with *Tristram*. Here Swinburne employs a highly overrun form of the heroic couplet, handling it with

Poems of  
beauty,  
freedom,  
and pa-  
triotism

His  
Arthurian  
Poems.

an ease and intensity which more than atone for the poem's occasional diffuseness. This diffuseness is his besetting sin, and it becomes especially exasperating in certain of his later poems, where inspiration sleeps and the verse walks—to use his own phrase—‘with the mere activity of a blind somnambulism’.

His Plays. Swinburne's plays have had no success upon the stage; the greater number of them, in view of their looseness of dramatic structure, have perhaps not greatly deserved to succeed. On the other hand, the modern playgoer, with his degraded and degrading preferences, has certainly not deserved or earned the beauty which suffuses cunningly-rhymed *Lochrine*, and much of *Chastelard*, the first play of Swinburne's trilogy on Mary Queen of Scots. The second play, *Bothwell*, is of great length and diffuseness, but has fine historical colour and some great dramatic moments.<sup>1</sup> *Mary Stuart*, the third play, shows a decline in beauty of expression, though its reading of Mary Stuart's character is at once dramatic and faithful to history. Swinburne's remaining plays are *Marino Faliero* (1885)—rendered hopeless from a stage point of view by the Doge's lengthy final soliloquies—*Rosamund, Queen of the Lombards*, and *The Duke of Gandia*. *The Sisters* (1892) is a remarkable attempt to introduce the spirit of Elizabethan tragedy into the setting of a modern English country house.

William  
Morris.

In one sense the poetry of William Morris (1834–1896) might seem little akin to the practical activities of his life; for the best of it has no note of the social propagandism which allured him from the beginning, and absorbed so much of his energy towards the end. On the other hand, each of the many arts which Morris practised and mastered only becomes fully intelligible if considered in relation to the rest, and to his belief that the highest art could only be forthcoming in societies where the practical conditions of life were humane, simple, and beautiful. His earliest volume of poems, *The Defence of Guenevere and Other Poems* (1858), is strongly pre-Raphaelite in form, and shows the influence of Rossetti, who profoundly affected his early outlook on art and life. Many of the poems in this volume have a strange and delicate, yet very definite beauty. Some of them—e. g. *The Chapel in Lyonesse*—are almost perfect in their mediaevalism. The Arthurian poems—notably the name-poem and *King Arthur's Tomb*—show an artistry as sensitive as Malory's, though far less rich and full. More dramatic and realistic are *The Haystack in the Floods* and *Sir Peter Harpdon's End*. This volume illustrates Morris's fervid love of the Middle Ages and his constant desire to recapture their spirit, and avoid the morbid and disconcerting influence which he attributed to the Renaissance. His next poem, *The Life and Death of Jason* (1867), won him the general

*The De-  
fence of  
Guene-  
vere, &c.*

<sup>1</sup> For instance, the passage of Mary and Darnley through the vaults of Holyrood past the tomb of the murdered Rizzio; Darnley's soliloquy before his death; and several other passages.



popularity which had been denied to the earlier volume. Originally intended as a tale in *The Earthly Paradise*, it became too bulky for its setting, and had to be issued separately. It retells the old story of the Fleece in simple flowing verse. Though this seldom attempts or achieves intensity, the poem contains two of Morris's most charming lyrics, the Songs of Orpheus and of the Sirens.

*The Earthly Paradise* (1868-1870) is a collection of stories, half Northern, half Greek, told in alternation by the members of a Viking crew, and by the Greek settlers of a far-off Atlantic island who had shown them hospitality. The sources<sup>1</sup> of both Greek and Scandinavian mythology are freely drawn upon, and the repertory is supplemented from many other quarters. The result has been likened to tapestry, by reason both of its breadth and of its low and simple scheme of artistic values. Morris professed in the Prologue and Epilogue of this work, as elsewhere, to have followed the way of his revered master, Chaucer. In telling a tale he certainly achieves the right Chaucerian flow and clearness, though there is little of the gusto and throbbing vitality which distinguish the Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales* and many of the *Tales* themselves. The book is entirely written in three Chaucerian metres—the heroic couplet, octosyllabic couplet, and rime royal; in the latter are written the charming introductions which usher in the separate months.

The longest, and perhaps most successful, tale of *The Earthly Paradise*, *The Lovers of Gudrun*, was Norse in its origin, and had been inspired by Morris's growing interest in Iceland and Icelandic. It represents a transition from the romance to the epic; and this transition has become complete in his greatest poem, *Sigurd the Volsung* (1877), written after his visits to Iceland in 1871 and 1873. The great old story, familiarized, and, in Morris's opinion, vulgarized, by Wagner's handling of it, is here treated with a simple largeness and force which make it one of the greatest long poems in our language. It has not yet come into its own, largely owing to the conservatism and insensibility of certain modern critics who have thought that because it aims at creating a reality remote from the present, and even from the historical past, it possesses little reality of any kind, and little force or beauty save the purely decorative. There could be no more complete fallacy than this. Wonderful as are the poem's decorative passages, for instance the descriptions of Brynhild's tapestry, and of the House of the Niblungs, such narrative passages as the slaying of Sigurd and the great fight in Atli's hall are more wonderful and enthralling still; and when the narrative and decorative blend, as in the transformation of Sigurd and Gunnar before the Riding of the Wavering Flame, the swinging couplet beats and throbs with tense poetic inspiration. The great

*The  
Earthly  
Paradise.*

*Sigurd the  
Volsung.*

<sup>1</sup> For the 'sources' of *The Earthly Paradise*, cf. J. W. Mackail's *Life of William Morris*, vol. i, pp. 209-14.

defect of the poem, and the one through which it remains unpopular, is not any lack of narrative or dramatic power, but the disproportionate length of the opening book, which, though fine in itself, is not necessary to the Sigurd story, and conveys the impression that the poem is lacking in unity. Morris's chief remaining achievements in poetry are *Poems by the Way*, the quaint mediaeval morality *Love is Enough* (1873), and the socialistic poetry which he contributed to *The Commonweal*. Among the finest of his prose romances are *The House of the Wolfings* and *The Sundering Flood*.

Dante  
Gabriel  
Rossetti.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882) holds a place apart in Victorian literature. His great contemporaries and successors, Tennyson, Browning, Swinburne, and Meredith, each held strong ethical convictions, and each strove in his poetry to express the faith that was in him, no less than the art. With Rossetti, however, faith was art, and art faith; and both were as far removed as were Heredia's from the influence of contemporary speculation. With Holman Hunt, Millais and Woolner, Rossetti had founded the 'pre-Raphaelite' brotherhood, and the name, originally used in connexion with painting, became subsequently applied to the fashion of poetry followed by certain members of the school. Rossetti was, on his own showing, first and foremost a painter, and the painter's insight and touch are everywhere evident through his writings. His poetical production, like that of Coleridge, falls into two widely separated periods. The first of these extended from his nineteenth to his twenty-fifth year (1847-1853), the second from 1870 till his death. His first publication was his volume of translations entitled *The Early Italian Poets*, afterwards known as *Dante and his Circle*. These, although not published till 1861, were, as his brother W. M. Rossetti tells us, 'the work almost entirely of his eighteenth to his twenty-second year'. His early original poetry, though written before 1853, was not published till 1870, much of it being disinterred for this purpose from his wife's grave.

His third published volume was *Ballads and Sonnets* (1881), which title indicates accurately the main forms in which he attained mastery. *The Blessed Damozel*, originally published in the pre-Raphaelite monthly, *The Germ*, and reprinted, after revision, in the hardly less famous *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*, had a profound influence on Rossetti's younger contemporaries, including Morris and Swinburne. This poem, as he has himself told us, was suggested to him by Poe's *Raven*. 'I saw', he continues, 'that Poe had done the utmost it was possible to do with the grief of the lover on earth, and I determined to reverse the conditions and give utterance to the yearnings of the loved one in heaven.' The passionate yet unearthly beauty of the poem renders it unlike anything else in our literature, and gives fresh meaning and value to the old ballad metre. *Sister Helen* is as satanic in subject as *The Blessed Damozel* is celestial, and here, as in *Lilith* and *Troy*



*Town*, Rossetti has made effective use of the recurring refrain. *The King's Tragedy*, which enshrines the heroism of Kate Barlass, and *The White Ship* are splendid specimens of the historical ballad; *Stratton Water* is less successful in this kind. Particularly beautiful is *Rose Mary*, which contains such poetry as this:

In the hair dark-waved the face lay white,  
As the moon lies in the lap of night,  
And as night through which no moon may dart  
Lies on a pool in the woods apart,  
So lay the swoon on the weary heart.

As a sonneteer Rossetti is best known by *The House of Life*, one of the greatest among English sonnet-sequences. Here, as in his other poetry, Rossetti displays a sensuousness which to some has appeared to merge occasionally in sensuality; but this sensuousness is the soul of his genius, and it is somewhat beside the point to rail at the quality which has produced such exquisite work as *Willow-wood* and *Life-in-Love*.

James Thomson (1834-1882), army schoolmaster, and subsequently journalist, wrote some fine early verse, notably the classically beautiful *Requiem* (1858); but he did not reach his full strength till after his association with Charles Bradlaugh, to whose magazine, *The National Reformer*, he contributed many of the poems by which he is most famous. *To Our Ladies of Death* (1861), a poem suggested by the *Suspiria de Profundis* of De Quincey, first attracted the attention of Thomson's friend and editor, Mr. Bertram Dobell. Its profound melancholy found intenser expression in his greatest work, *The City of Dreadful Night* (1880). The black pessimism of the poem puts Thomson in touch with Vigny and Leopardi, and its sinister imagery can hardly be paralleled outside Poe. There is something strange and sinister in the very technique of the poem—in the recurring double rhymes, in the stern relentless beat of such a refrain as

Yet I strode on austere;  
No hope could have no fear,

and in the long-drawn anguish of this other refrain,

I wake from day-dreams to this real night.

Thomson's two other long poems, *Vane's Story* (1864) and *Weddah and Om-el-Bonain* (1868), though sad, do not show the intensity of despair which characterizes his masterpiece. He could write charmingly in lighter vein, as in *Sunday up the River*, which contains such glorious lyrics as 'The wine of love is music', and 'Give a man a horse he can ride'. He has left some notable prose, partly critical, and partly imaginative. His best prose work is *A Lady of Sorrow* (1862-4).

Many, unfortunately, have translated poetry who were not poets themselves; but very few have earned the reputation of a great original poet on the strength of a single translation. Yet this is the case with Edward FitzGerald (1809-1883). The

James  
Thomson.

Fitz-  
Gerald.

close friend of Tennyson, Thackeray, and Carlyle, he published in 1851 his beautiful prose dialogue *Euphranor*, and he subsequently translated six plays of Calderon, and some others of Aeschylus and Sophocles. But his fame depends not on these, but on his immortal rendering of the *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám* (1859). This translation, like most great translations, is very far from being faithful to the letter of its original. It deals freely with the quatrains (*rubaiyat*) of the old tentmaker, often, as FitzGerald himself confesses, 'mashing many of them together,' and perhaps forfeiting some of their simplicity. But as Persian scholars admit, the utterance of Omar is there, though in a heightened form, and with modern additions. The result has all the spontaneity and force of a great original poem. FitzGerald's quatrain, with the curious refrain-like effect of its unrhymed third line, shifts easily to the poem's changing emotions of joy, aspiration, resignation, wistfulness, and defiance. There is a haunting union throughout of the *carpe diem* with the *sunt lacrimae rerum*. The imagery is strange and exquisite, and, as may be seen by comparing the poem's successive drafts, it was in many cases evolved gradually by FitzGerald himself. On the strength of this one poem he stands a very little way below the greatest poets of his age.

Mrs. Browning (Elizabeth Moulton Barrett; 1806-1861) wrote both verse and prose at an early age; but even her second volume, *The Seraphim*, published when she was thirty-two, shows but little sign of genius. She married Robert Browning in 1846, and her intermediate and later poems show occasional and not always favourable signs of his influence. In 1851 she published *Casa Guidi Windows*, a poem urging Italy to regain her freedom; and this was followed by a series of other poems, in most cases of inferior value, on the same theme. In 1850 she had published her greatest work, *Sonnets from the Portuguese*. In 1862 appeared her *Last Poems*.

There is much of Mrs. Browning's poetry which it is impossible to read with pleasure. She is habitually diffuse; she constantly surfeits the reader with a syrupy and cloying emotionalism; her technique is wanton; she rhymes 'hoof' with 'off', 'ruin' with 'pursuing', 'doubted' with 'without it', and 'strangles' with 'angels': and her handling of the free metres which she affected was frequently clumsy. But throughout all her work there are strokes of high genius—of poetry touched with passion, and flaming out in images of strange beauty. These are fairly frequent in her longest poem, *Aurora Leigh*, in which, for all its faults, the love story between Aurora and her cousin is by no means ill managed. But Mrs. Browning does better work in the ballad or short romance, which after different fashions tend to restrain her characteristic 'lushness' of utterance. The *Sonnets from the Portuguese* are an almost unique expression of a woman's love. There is a fine romanticism in *The Romaunt of Margret*, *The Romaunt of the Page*, and other poems in the same kind, though the old



diffuseness appears in *The Rhyme of the Duchess May*. Among her most beautiful poems must be counted *A Child's Grave at Florence*, *The Great God Pan*, and *Cowper's Grave*, all of which are instinct with true pathos, and with her passionate love of humanity.

Matthew Arnold (1822-1888), after some prentice-work and prize-winning at Rugby and Oxford, published in 1849 his first volume of poems, *The Strayed Reveller and Other Poems*. In 1852 appeared *Empedocles on Etna and Other Poems*; in 1853, *Poems*, including *Sohrab and Rustum* and *The Scholar Gipsy*; in 1855, *Balder Dead and Separation*; in 1858, *Merope*; in 1866, *Thyrsis*, and in 1867, his last volume, *New Poems*. The nature of his poetry makes it possible to treat it as a whole, instead of tracing its various stages, as has been done in certain other cases in this volume. The fascination which it possesses for all poetically sensitive minds lies in its combination of modern feeling with the most delicate and classical quality of expression. Many of Arnold's poems, and especially of his earlier ones, are purely narrative and descriptive; the best have the white and tempered glow of Greek poetry. To this class belong the beautiful *Forsaken Merman*, and the lightly wrought and pathetic *Tristram and Iseult*. *Sohrab and Rustum* is a heroic tale of the East, perfectly told in majestic blank verse laden with Homeric similes. *Balder Dead* follows a Scandinavian legend, but is developed by Arnold after the Greek epic manner. Noteworthy in their kinds are *The Neckan* and *The Church of Brou*. In Arnold's coldly correct Greek tragedy *Merope*, the choruses display, rather distressingly, the pitfalls ever in the path of English unrhymed lyric. In all of these poems pathos is more evident than passion, and light than fire; some of Arnold's characteristic qualities and shortcomings become disengaged if we compare *Tristram and Iseult* with Swinburne's *Tristram of Lyonesse*. But in his best work of this class there is a sureness of formal handling, and a pulse of beauty which compensate for an occasional weakness or vagueness of emotional quality.

In another class of poem, notably in *Obermann*, *Obermann Once More*, and *Lines Written in Kensington Gardens*, Arnold faces the problem of existence, and declares the faith, or as in some moods, the lack of faith, that is in him. Reading them, we feel that his outlook on existence was as determinedly ethical as Rossetti's was determinedly non-ethical. Like Tennyson, he was profoundly interested in the spiritual problems of his day, but his attitude towards life and the hereafter is more wistful and dubious even than Tennyson's own. It takes form sometimes in the brooding and self-pity of *Switzerland* and *Despondency*, sometimes in the stoicism of *Resignation*. Arnold is at once the incarnation of the modern spirit and its most unsparing critic. His outlook on life is pessimistic, but his pessimism is alleviated by his keen joy in all beauty, and especially in Nature's beauty; and by the

Matthew  
Arnold.

belief, or aspiration toward belief, which he experiences in his more Wordsworthian moods, that Nature imparts to those who love her a revelation of the universal spirit. Most typical of his genius are such poems as *The Scholar Gipsy* and its companion *Thyrsis*, an elegy upon Arthur Hugh Clough, which contain all the finest qualities of his poetry—despondency, wistful aspiration, a keen sense of Nature's beauty, and a quiet joy therein, a humanism blent of the Greek spirit and the modern, and a classical might and delicacy of expression. His lyric power is perhaps best seen in the brief and wonderful *Requiescat*, in the Song of Calicles from *Empedocles on Etna*, and in such poems as *A Southern Night* and *Dover Beach*, with its splendidly managed free rhyming verse.

Clough.

Arthur Hugh Clough (1819–1861) represents the same spirit of intellectual questioning and revolt which finds expression in many poems of his friend Arnold; but in his case inspiration is deficient, and this lack is hardly compensated by the humour of his best-known poem, *The Bothie of Tober-na-Vuolich* (1848), described by himself as a 'long vacation pastoral'. Here he employs a form of hexameter which is both harsh and loose, and compares unfavourably with the craftsmanlike anapaestic hexameters used by Charles Kingsley in *Andromeda*. In his shorter poems Clough seldom achieves so consummate an image as the famous one embodied in the lines:

For while the tired waves vainly breaking,  
Seem here no painful inch to gain,  
Far back, through creeks and inlets making,  
Comes silent, flooding in, the main.

George  
Meredith.

The chief works in poetry of George Meredith (1828–1909) are *Poems* (1851), *Modern Love and Other Poems* (1862), *Poems and Lyrics of the Joy of Earth* (1883), *Ballads and Poems of Tragic Life* (1887), *A Reading of Earth* (1888), *The Empty Purse and Other Poems* (1892), *Odes in Contribution to the Song of French History* (1898), and *A Reading of Life, with Other Poems* (1901). The twofold nature of his verse has been well indicated by his most discriminating critic, Mr. G. M. Trevelyan, in the two chapter-headings which describe him as 'The Poet' and 'The Singer of Strange Songs'. In the first capacity he is the lyrist of *Love in the Valley*, *Modern Love*, *Phoebus with Admetus*, *Lucifer in Starlight*, *The Lark Ascending*, and many other poems for ever memorable by their beauty; in the second he is the seer who wrote *The Empty Purse*, and the *Odes to the Comic Spirit* and *The Spirit of Earth in Autumn*—poems which are strange, rugged and sometimes contorted rather than beautiful, and are first and foremost directed toward setting forth his faith.<sup>1</sup> In many poems—for instance, *The Thrush in February* and *Melampus*—the two qualities blend, but Mr. Trevelyan's distinction is just and necessary.

<sup>1</sup> For an account of this, see the account of Wordsworth given in an earlier chapter.



Meredith's greatest and most popular poem is *Love in the Valley*, of which Stevenson said that it 'haunted him and made him drunk like wine'. Throughout its stanzas the lover sees the beauty of his beloved reflected in the beauty of the changing year. The poem's fervour of feeling and intense beauty of expression make it one of the greatest English love-lyrics and lyrics of Nature. His earlier poem, *Modern Love*, written in sixteen-lined sonnets, achieves on the whole less beauty, but is a powerful psychological study in the theme indicated by its name. In the sensuousness and warmth of colouring which inform such poems as *Love in the Valley*, Meredith is sometimes very near to Keats. His masterly technical skill—e. g. the device by which in *Love in the Valley* and *Phoebus with Admetus* he ends alternate lines with a strong double stress—gives his best poems in this class a rare and individual beauty.

Christina Rossetti (1830–1894) is perhaps most widely known by the charming fantasy of her youth, *Goblin Market*; but this was followed by finer and more typical work. Both in form and spirit her poetry differs widely from that of her brother, Dante Gabriel. He had been strongly influenced by the romantic and sensuous aspects of the revival which culminated in the Oxford Movement, but he had disregarded its inspiring faith. Christina Rossetti, on the contrary, avoided the sensuousness and clung to the faith, expressing this in poetry whose simplicity often kindles into a white flame of passion. Lionel Johnson said of her best religious poems that they seem 'the national hymns of heaven'. She has left a great mass of religious poetry, and much of it is of this high order. *Uphill*, *Passing Away*, and *The Last Prayer* are inspired by her characteristic simplicity and intensity. She has written some perfect sonnets and songs; in the first kind may be noted *Remember me when I am gone away*, and *Monna Innominata*; in the second, the universally known *My heart is like a singing bird*, and *When I am dead, my dearest*.

Christina  
Rossetti.

*The Angel in the House* (1854–60) of Coventry Patmore is a domestic idyll: though it has on the whole been underrated and misjudged, far finer work appears in Patmore's *Odes* (1868) and *The Unknown Eros* (1877). He won the homage of Francis Thompson and the scorn of Swinburne, who parodied *The Angel in the House* savagely in *The Heptalogia*. Arthur O'Shaughnessy (1844–1881) displays rare charm and delicacy in the *Épique on Women* (1870), *Music and Moonlight* (1874), and several other volumes. Robert Buchanan (1841–1901) wrote, sometimes with power, of many subjects—of Scotland in *Idylls and Legends of Inverburn* (1865), of London in the *London Poems* (1866), and of Celtic mysticism in *The Book of Orm* (1870). Lord Lytton (Owen Meredith—1831–1891) wrote much verse, from his pre-Raphaelite drama *Clytemnestra* (1855) onward to the posthumously published *Marah* (1892). His work is largely imitative, and seldom achieves beauty of

Patmore,  
O'Shaughnessy, and  
others.

the first order. Sir Edwin Arnold (1832-1904) is chiefly read in his *Light of Asia* (1879), a fluent and thinly inspired epic of Buddhism, and in the less notable *Light of the World* (1891).

There is still greater fluency in the work of Lewis Morris (1833-1907)—*The Epic of Hades* (1876-7), *Gycia* (1886) and other volumes—but with him inspiration is not even thin; it is non-existent. William Cory (or Johnson; 1823-1892) was an Eton master whose two volumes, successively issued in 1858 and 1877 under the title *Ionica*, contain many poems of classical delicacy and strength. Perhaps his best-known thing is his beautiful adaptation of a Greek epigram by Callimachus; hardly inferior in quality are *Mimnermus in Church* and *An Invocation*.

The tradition of Præd was carried on in the *vers de société* of Frederick Locker-Lampson (1821-1895; *London Lyrics*, 1857). Charles Stuart Calverley (1831-1884) and James Kenneth Stephen (1859-1892) excel in parody and occasional verse; the former's *Cock and Bull Story* is one of the best parodies ever written. The most popular work of Thomas Edward Brown (1830-1897) is probably his vivid *Fo'c's'le Yarns* (1881), written in the Manx dialect; but far finer poetry is to be found in his serious English verse, notably in *Aber Stations*, a poignantly beautiful lament for his dead son, and the *Epistula ad Dakyns*, rendered intense and exquisite by the poet's passionate faith in Nature.

Henley.

The pupil of Brown, and the friend and over-frank critic of Stevenson, W. E. Henley (1849-1903) lives in English poetry chiefly through his *Book of Verses* (1888) and *Hawthorn and Lavender* (1899). He had a genius for the short lyric, and many of his love poems, e. g. *Come where my lady lies*, and *Dearest, when I am dead*, are perfect in their kind. His rugged and defiant paganism found expression in the universally known *Out of the night that covers me*. His *Hospital Verses* record with vividness and humour the days of illness at Edinburgh, when he was visited by Stevenson and Baxter. In *A late lark twitters from the quiet skies* he has left a superb specimen of the English unrhymed lyric. Every line of his verse bears the impress of his vehement and original personality.

Wilde.

The spontaneous sweetness and grace of Henley's poetry are English to the core; a lower and more exotic perfection is to be found in much of the verse of Oscar Wilde (1854-1900)—most notably in certain of his sonnets, and in such longer poems as *Panthea* and *The Sphinx*. An intenser note rings in his splendid apostrophe to England, *Ave Imperatrix* (1881), and in his poignant *Ballad of Reading Gaol* (1898). Wilde is most widely known by his artificially brilliant dramas, *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1893), *A Woman of No Importance* (1894), and *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1899), but his real strength was not reached either in drama or, apart from the two poems last mentioned, in verse, but in the highly wrought prose of *Intentions* (1891), his greatest volume, where his passionate love of beauty



glows beneath its flaunting veil of paradox and banter. The tragic note of *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* rings through his fine piece of confessional prose, *De Profundis* (1905).

Among the most notable women poets of this period are Jean Ingelow (1820-1897), whose *High Tide on the Coast of Lincolnshire* possesses a power reflected in a few of her other poems; and Augusta Webster (1837-1894), whose best work, poetic and dramatic, occurs in her *Dramatic Studies* (1866), *Portraits* (1870), and *The Sentence* (1887).

Francis Thompson (1859-1907) had probably more inspiration than any poet of his generation, and many would class him among the greatest English lyric poets. His earlier volumes<sup>1</sup> contain some perfect poems in praise of children; and here he shows already that love of rich words and far-sought images which runs through all his work. Thus he writes in the second of the *Sister Songs* :

Francis  
Thomp-  
son.

In all I work, my hand includeth thine;  
Thou rushest down in every stream  
Whose passion frets my spirit's deepening gorge,  
Unhoodst mine eyes-heart, and fliest my dream;  
Thou swing'st the hammers of my forge;  
As the innocent moon, that nothing does but shine,  
Moves all the labouring surges of the world.

A simpler and more Blake-like touch appears in *Little Jesus*. There is a different and Wordsworthian simplicity in *The Daisy*, and an Elizabethan ring in the beautiful *Carrier Song*, modelled on Drayton's *Shepherd's Sirena*. But in Thompson's best-known poem, *The Hound of Heaven*, and in all the work that is most truly his own, he freights his verse with rich beauty, and sets it to drive beneath strange gales of the spirit. The deep sensuousness of his religious poetry, and his love of strange 'conceits', puts him in touch with Crashaw, to whose poetry he had always been strongly drawn. The following is a typical image from *The Hound of Heaven* :

I dimly guess what Time in mists confounds;  
Yet ever and anon a trumpet sounds  
From the hid battlements of Eternity;  
Those shaken mists a space unsettle, then  
Round the half-glimpsèd turrets slowly wash again.

His *Ode to the Setting Sun* and *A Corymbus for Autumn* have the same rich music. A lighter and not less exquisite strain is sometimes audible in his poetry—for instance, in the concluding lines of *July Fugitive*. His work suffers from a disability common to all poetry written in the ornate style; when inspiration has passed out of it it becomes not merely disappointing, as does simpler poetry under similar conditions, but exasperating.

<sup>1</sup> *Poems* (1893), *Sister Songs* (1895), *New Poems* (1897).

John Davidson. The life of John Davidson<sup>1</sup> (1857–1909) was a long fight against hardship and neglect, a fight in which he exulted, though it was to bring him to a tragic death. That suffering and exultation begot some of his finest poetry, notably his *Ballad of the Making of a Poet* and certain of his *Fleet Street Eclogues*. His powerful and sinister imagination is at its height in his *Ballad of a Nun*, and in certain of his shorter lyrics and ballads, as well as in his insufficiently appreciated poetic dramas. The conditions of his life made it necessary for him to write fast and much; and a good deal of his verse has suffered accordingly. In his striking essay *On Poetry* he exalts blank verse at the expense of rhyme.

Rupert Brooke. Rupert Brooke, one of the most bitterly lamented victims of the Great War, left two volumes, *Poems* and *1914 and Other Poems*, which suggest that had he lived he might have risen to almost any height of greatness. As it is, he has left some work of final beauty, amongst which may rank the Sonnets—especially the six war sonnets—of his later volume. *Grantchester* is an idyll compact of whimsicality and beauty, and equally whimsical and beautiful are *The Great Lover* and *Heaven*.

## CHAPTER XXXII

### VICTORIAN PROSE: MISCELLANEOUS

Chief characteristics — Macaulay, Carlyle, Froude — Other historians — Newman, Mill — Scientific writers — Lockhart and other biographers — Criticism: Matthew Arnold, Swinburne, Ruskin, Bagehot, Pater, Symonds, Henley, Stephen, Lang — Borrow, Kinglake, Burton, and others.

APART from the novel, the most interesting and important prose form of the period, from our present point of view, is literary criticism; and here, as has been already shown, there was remarkable development, both in form and outlook. But the Victorian age was subtle and various, and its literature includes many writers whose aim was not primarily literary.

Macaulay. Thomas Babington Macaulay (1800–1859) is important both as literary critic and historian. He had begun to send articles to the *Edinburgh Review* shortly after leaving Cambridge; his first contribution had been his well-known essay on Milton. After spending five years in India, he returned to England in 1838, and collected and published in 1843 the essays which had already appeared under his name. The first two volumes of his *History of England* appeared in 1848, the second two in 1855. In addition to this work he has left several speeches and

<sup>1</sup> *Fleet Street Eclogues* (1893–6), *Ballads and Songs* (1894), *The Last Ballad and Other Poems* (1899), *Self's the Man* (1901), *God and Mammon* (1907–8), &c., &c.



several articles originally contributed to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. His essays are historical, biographical, and also critical and philosophical, in so far as he can be said to have understood criticism and philosophy. His chief merit as an essayist is his remarkable vigour and vividness, his power of painting scenes and men and happenings in bold lines and glittering colours, and of presenting a picture which if not life, still less something better than life, was at least a taking substitute for life. Macaulay had a mighty memory and a not less mighty power of marshalling detail. This last mastery is conspicuous in his essays on Warren Hastings and Frederick the Great. He wrote with gusto of what he could understand, and he understood much; but he did not understand the highest things in poetry, philosophy or life. His canons were ultimately materialistic, and mysticism in all its forms was beyond his ken. A further defect is the combination of prejudice and inaccuracy which vitiates both his historical and his critical writings. His essay on Warren Hastings contains grotesque mistakes, and his estimate of Boswell is a grotesque misjudgment. His Whiggery is everywhere, and it is not the transfigured Whiggery of Burke. His hard and glossy style has been indicted by Matthew Arnold, and the indictment has not been quashed by Macaulay's modern apologists. His genius ultimately depends on his matchless vitality, on that insatiable curiosity which is the first virtue of both critic and historian, and on his power of making his readers curious and interested in their turn.

Macaulay's affinities are primarily with Jeffrey and the early *Edinburgh*, and ultimately with the eighteenth century. Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881) represents a different order and the working of mightier forces. His early work was written in *Edinburgh*, and consists chiefly of his *Life of Schiller* (1823) and many of the essays subsequently collected under the title of *Miscellanies*. The *Life* is an early evidence of that love of German poetry and philosophy which reappears in his praise of Novalis, Richter and Goethe, persists throughout his writings till the end, and merges with his own creative inspiration. All his work of this period is written in an admirably clear and correct, but also a perfectly conventional style. It was not till the years which he spent with his wife on the famous farm of Craigenputtock that he evolved the utterance which is truly his own. This appears for the first time in *Sartor Resartus* (1833-4), a philosophical and autobiographical work like nothing else in the language, which represents in the person of its 'hero', Teufelsdröckh, Carlyle's own spiritual striving and victory, his ethical and metaphysical, or mystical, beliefs, and certain facts of his early life. In this book, and in his second long work, *The French Revolution* (1837), his style has developed those intensely personal characteristics of ruggedness and force which it henceforth retains till the last. *The French Revolution* is of matchless descriptive power, and

Carlyle.

embodies, especially in the character of Mirabeau, Carlyle's belief that history is summed in the lives of its great men. Its form also illustrates his detestation of dry-as-dust compilation, and his conviction that history, truly understood, is an art depending on a careful selection of facts and a vivid human interpretation of them. *The French Revolution* is as truly a classic as *The Decline and Fall*, and its errors, though not few, are superficial and easily rectifiable.

In 1841 appeared *Heroes and Hero-Worship*, in 1843 *Past and Present*, and in 1845 *The Letters and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell*. Carlyle's hero-worship is offered as whole-heartedly to the mediaeval monk who is the chief character of *Past and Present*, and to Cromwell, as it is to Johnson, Goethe, Mahomet, and the other Heroes of the first volume. In *Past and Present* he develops once more, with an eloquence now passionate, now humorous, but always vehement and intensely personal, his belief that the world is merely a symbol of the unseen, yet that only in it and its daily tasks can man find his life's realization, which depends, not on happiness, but on toil and endurance and faith. His *Latter-Day Pamphlets* (1850) contain some masterly political satire. That great and beautiful biography, the *Life of Sterling*, appeared in 1851. His huge *History of Frederick the Great* (1858-65) embodies once more his hero-worship and admiration of the strong man at handgrips with danger and difficulty. His choice of a hero was in this instance unfortunate, and his admiration of Frederick is uncritical to a degree. Yet his tremendous capacity for research is evident both in his main narrative and in the summary of early German history which precedes it; and the accounts of Frederick's battles and the other stirring events of his career are narrated with enthralling vividness and power.

His qualities of genius.

Many of Carlyle's essential tenets have been indicated in the foregoing summary. To these may be added his passion for truth, and that hatred of shams and inefficiency which he has embodied in his statement of the 'clothes philosophy'; his fervent belief that life was not mechanical in its operation, but was the garment of God, the expression of a divine idea which 'means intensely and means good'; and his dislike of social injustice, and conviction that it could be abolished, not by the levelling of all wills, but by the elevation of the greatest and the best. These convictions are the driving force of his whole life. Yet Carlyle was not only a thinker and a preacher; he was a poet, lacking indeed a poet's knack of verse, but possessing the full poetic utterance and vision. Swinburne, moreover, who disliked him for many things, has described him as 'the most potent humorist of the century'. With him, as with Meredith, the humorous perception and the poetic are never far apart, and the two together enable him to see deep into the heart of things.

Historians.

Certain historians may here be briefly mentioned. The chief work of Henry Thomas Buckle (1821-1862) is his *History of*



*Civilization*, written clearly and forcibly, though never with inspiration. William Edward Hartpole Lecky (1838–1903) is notable for his *History of Rationalism*, his *History of England in the Eighteenth Century* (1878–90), and his still greater *History of European Morals from Augustus to Charlemagne* (1869). Chief among the extensive writings of John Robert Seeley (1834–1895) are *Ecce Homo* (1866) with its moving presentation of Christ, and *The Expansion of England* (1883), a book dealing in masterly fashion with certain chapters of British colonization. Edward Augustus Freeman (1823–1892) was a historian of great learning, some accuracy, and an un-inspired style, whose chief work is *The History of the Norman Conquest* (1867–79).

More to our present purpose, as possessing greater literary gifts, are John Richard Green (1837–1883), whose *Short History of the English People* (1874) is still very widely read, and possesses great charm; and James Anthony Froude (1818–1894), who was a great man of letters as well as a great historian. His most widely read work is probably his *Short Studies on Great Subjects* (four series, 1867–83), reprinted from *Fraser's Magazine*. The themes of the essays are historical, and they are written in an admirably clear and eloquent style, with much of the vigour and gusto of their author's friend and master, Carlyle. An earlier work of Froude's, his *History of England from the Fall of Wolsey to the Defeat of the Spanish Armada* (1856–70), displays his keen Protestantism, and his not less keen sense of his country's greatness. *Oceana* (1886) describes his travels in Australia and other parts of the Empire, and enables him to express his eager Imperialism. His *Thomas Carlyle* (1882–4) is masterly written, but Froude is often mistaken, and sometimes over-candid, regarding the facts of Carlyle's life. His great fault, as a historian, is his reckless inaccuracy. His great merit is his vivid power of recreating the historical past in winged and vivid prose.

Froude

Theology does not concern us here, except in so far as it touches literature; and it does this all too seldom throughout the nineteenth century. But in the work of John Henry Newman (1801–1890) it certainly does so consummately. It is not within our present province to discuss the main thesis of his greatest work, the *Apologia* (1864). Although this was written nearly twenty years after Newman had joined the Church of Rome, it is still the supreme expression in literature of the 'Oxford Movement'. Those who derive little comfort or light from its general teaching may nevertheless exult in the limpid, yet often passionate beauty of its prose, which shifts and shapes itself freely to every movement of its author's thought and feeling. Prose of similar strength and delicacy is to be found throughout the rest of Newman's writings—most notably, perhaps, in his finely conceived *Idea of a University*.

Newman.

Henry Longueville Mansel (1820–1871), Dean of St. Paul's, applied to theology the teachings of his distinguished master,

Sir William Hamilton. His chief work is *The Limits of Religious Thought* (1859), which on its appearance aroused much hostile comment, owing to its suggestion that the morality of the Deity might be at conflict with the morality of man.

John  
Stuart  
Mill.

Among the philosophers of the period the earliest great name is that of John Stuart Mill (1806–1873). His chief philosophic works are his *System of Logic* (1843), *Principles of Political Economy* (1848), and *Utilitarianism* (1863). Neither his psychology nor his metaphysics are in accordance with the highest philosophic thought of the present day—it is indeed doubtful whether he had any metaphysics worth consideration—but his exposition of logical method is stimulating and original. Mill's *System* is read wherever logic is taught, largely, it must be admitted, because its conclusions, by their inadequacy, suggest the need of some more comprehensive and transcendental system. Both the *Logic* and the treatise on *Utilitarianism* are written in a clear and adequate style, free of affectation and of the perplexing technical terminology common in philosophical treatises. The latter work is a brief and lucid statement of the principles of the ethical, or semi-ethical, system which had been transmitted to Mill through his father, James Mill, from Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832), the founder of the modern English school of utilitarian philosophy.

Spencer  
and  
others.

The writings of Herbert Spencer (1820–1903) are both scientific and philosophic in aim, and include his *First Principles* (1862), *Principles of Psychology* (1870–2), *Principles of Sociology* (1876–96), and *Data of Ethics* (1892–3). He made the theory of evolution the starting-point for his *Synthetic Philosophy*, and endeavoured to apply certain first principles, evolved biologically, to the ethical and sociological interpretation of life.

The most widely read philosophic work of James Martineau (1805–1900) is his *Types of Ethical Theory* (1885). His own theory of ethics was strongly religious and anti-materialistic. Two greater names are those of Thomas Hill Green (1836–1882) and Edward Caird (1835–1908), both of whom did much toward deepening the tone of English philosophic thought by bringing it into touch with the higher transcendental philosophy. Green's *Prolegomena to Ethics* (1883) stated the obligation of social service with a force and profundity which have had a marked, if indirect, effect on English national life.

Scientific  
Writers.

Science enters even less than philosophy into the scope of the present volume, and it is here only possible to mention the following writers as having influenced profoundly not only the scientific thought, but the general outlook, of their age: Charles Lyell (1797–1875), *Principles of Geology* (1830–3); Hugh Miller (1802–1856), *Old Red Sandstone* (1840); Robert Chambers (1802–1871), *Vestiges of the Natural History of*



*Creation* (1844); and Charles Darwin (1809–1882), *The Origin of Species* (1859) and *The Descent of Man* (1871). The effect upon English poetry of the theory of evolution developed by these writers and by Alfred Russel Wallace, has already been indicated. Still more important than these, from our present point of view, is Thomas Henry Huxley (1825–1895). A pugnacious and powerfully equipped champion of Darwinism, he applied its teachings to mankind in *Man's Place in Nature* (1863), with a vigour and ease of expression which give him high place as a man of letters. Huxley, moreover, had a strong ethical and metaphysical side to his nature, as may be seen from his *Lay Sermons* (1870) and his *Collected Essays*. His conception of cosmic nature as a force to be combated by ethical man is akin to the interpretation of her which appears in Tennyson's *In Memoriam* and in much other Victorian poetry.

The greatest biography of the last century and a half is the *Life of Scott* by John Gibson Lockhart, whose connexion with *Blackwood's* and the *Quarterly* has been already noted. Lockhart was the son-in-law of Scott, and had the advantage of his intimate acquaintance; yet such a privilege unfortunately does not invariably result in good biography. But Lockhart's *Life* is superb; its style is vivid and free, yet capable of the highest dignity and eloquence, as in the great death-scene. Splendid tact and adroitness are shown in the handling of detail. Scott's figure is treated with a reverence which never degenerates into unreasoning hero-worship; and it lives with a vivid authenticity that cannot be paralleled outside Boswell's *Johnson*. Lockhart has left some fine work in other kinds, notably in his translation of *Spanish Ballads* (1823); but the *Life of Scott* remains his masterpiece.

Lockhart  
and other  
bio-  
graphers.

Of lesser yet sterling merit are *The Life of Thomas Arnold* (1844) by Arthur Penrhyn Stanley (1815–1881); the *Lives of Goldsmith* (1848), *Landor* (1869), and *Dickens* (1872–4), by John Forster (1812–1876); and the long and most erudite *Life of Milton* (1858–80) by David Masson (1822–1907).

We have dealt elsewhere with the poetry of Matthew Arnold (1822–1888); his prose consists mainly of the successive volumes in which he criticizes English literature, religion, and life. His chief works in purely literary criticism were *On Translating Homer* (1861), *On the Study of Celtic Literature* (1867), *Essays in Criticism*, First and Second Series (1865 and 1881). He is one of England's greatest critics, and his writings have had a profound effect upon her literary outlook; yet his judgments, both particular and general, were frequently arbitrary and perverse. He considered Shelley's original poetry to be on the whole 'less satisfactory than his translations', and thought it likely that his essays and letters would come to stand higher than his poems; he exalted Byron at the expense of Shelley and Coleridge; he misunderstood French poetry, and glorified unduly such writers of delicate

Criticism  
—Mat-  
thew  
Arnold.

French prose as Joubert and the two de Guérins. He loved Wordsworth's poetry, but strove to reject what he called his 'philosophy'—that is to say, the mysticism which is his inspiration. He was apt to use his conception of 'the grand style' as a sort of Procrustes' bed to the stature of which all authors—and especially the Romantics—must be lopped or stretched. He was frequently blinded by surface exaggeration or violence to the presence of the real strength which often accompanies these qualities. But as against all this, he remains a very great critic owing to his high, clear sense of beauty, and his constant insistence on standards which he deemed the highest. The successor of the Romantic movement, he did much toward pointing out its excesses and the dangers to which it was exposed if unchastened by classicism. His insistence on the 'disinterestedness' of true criticism and on the value of the comparative method, his belief that poetry should rather be felt and understood in the concrete than discussed and defined in the abstract, are wholly sane and valuable.

In *Culture and Anarchy* (1869) he draws his famous distinction between 'Hebraism' and 'Hellenism', declares the England of his day to be rather Philistine than Hellene, and insists on the value to her of 'culture' with its accompanying 'sweetness and light'. His superiority to the fierce struggle of life, and his aloofness from the extremer forms of enthusiasm, make him antipathetic to many; but all may admire his eager response to beauty as he understood it, his high sense of the critic's calling, his graceful, and frequently exquisite, style, and the delightful irony which lights up such a masterpiece as his *Friendship's Garland* (1870). In Arnold the older German influence, which had worked so strongly on English thought through Coleridge and Carlyle, begins to wane and to be replaced by the newer French spirit. Arnold had a deep admiration for Goethe, but he also loved France, and pointed England constantly to her example both in literature and life. He thus differs from Coleridge and Hazlitt, both of whom had expressed their scorn for French thought and art.

Swin-  
burne.

In the critical writings of Algernon Charles Swinburne we find the transition complete. Swinburne was practically unaffected by the German genius, but he has probably done more than any modern Englishman to make his countrymen feel and understand the genius of French literature. Arnold, as we have seen, failed to understand French poetry; but Swinburne understood it to the full, made others understand it, and even wrote it himself with mastery. His finest tributes to the poets of France were written in verse; but he has also written much prose in their praise and especially in praise of his idol, Victor Hugo. His deep love and understanding of English literature are evident throughout his volumes of critical essays, *Essays and Studies* (1875), *Miscellanies* (1885) and *Studies in Prose and Poetry* (1892); and they appear to the



best advantage in his masterly essays on Beaumont and Fletcher, Webster, and other Elizabethan dramatists. Some of his finest English occurs in his early volume on William Blake (1868). At his best Swinburne has a magnificent gift of prose: he possesses passion, gusto, humour, and deadly qualities of satire and invective. Beneath his rhapsodies there often lies the keenest critical discrimination. His chief critical virtues are his almost unerring sense of fine poetry, and his lyric power of praising it aright. His main fault is his exaggeration of praise and blame, and his lavish use of superlatives. His prose has the same defect as his poetry: owing to the expanded structure of its favourite period, it becomes ugly and cumbersome, once inspiration has passed out of it; and unfortunately, in his later work, this happened all too often.

John Ruskin (1819-1900), the son of a well-to-do wine merchant, gained the Newdigate at Oxford with his poem, *Salsette and Elephanta* (1839), and immediately after taking his degree published the first volume (1843) of his *Modern Painters*. This was primarily intended to vindicate the greatness of Turner as a painter against contemporary depreciation; but it contains much of Ruskin's general teaching on the relations between art and nature, expressed in some of his finest prose. He published a second volume of *Modern Painters* three years after the first, and in the preface to this dealt trenchantly with adverse critics of Turner and himself. In 1856 followed two more volumes of the same work; the fifth, and last, volume appeared in 1860. *Modern Painters* ranges widely over the field of art, and since art was inseparable in Ruskin's view from life's other main activities, there are many digressions into these.

To this period also belong the short treatise on *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1849) and the much longer *Stones of Venice* (1851-3). In *The Seven Lamps* Ruskin's growing pre-occupation with the ethical basis of art is strongly evident. This work, as he himself subsequently wrote in *The Crown of Wild Olive*, had for its main objects the glorification of Venetian Gothic architecture as having 'arisen out of a state of pure national faith and of domestic virtue', and the depreciation of Venetian Renaissance architecture as 'having arisen out of a state of concealed national infidelity and of domestic corruption'. The relation of his next work, *Unto This Last* (1862), to *The Stones of Venice* has been thus indicated by Ruskin in *Fors Clavigera*: 'The *Stones of Venice* taught the laws of constructive art, and the dependence of all human work or edifice for its beauty on the happy life of the workman. *Unto this Last* taught the laws of that life itself, and its dependence on the Sun of Justice.' *Unto this Last* and *Munera Pulveris* (1872) are chiefly devoted to showing the worthlessness of any theory of political economy which has not a true ethical basis. To this period belong the short treatises, *Sesame and*

*Lilies* (1865), *The Ethics of the Dust*, and *The Crown of Wild Olive* (1866), and to these were added, during his tenure of the Slade Professorship at Oxford, *Aratra Pentelici* (1872), and several other volumes. These deal with many forms of art—from Egyptian antiquities to Tuscan painting and engraving on wood and metal. There are further discussions on economics, and in the ten lectures entitled *The Eagle's Nest* (1872) Ruskin treats of the relations between science and art. Meanwhile, in January 1871, he had begun the series of monthly letters afterwards published as *Fors Clavigera*. This huge, wild miscellany touches on almost every subject he had previously handled: it also tells us much about his life, and is the fullest and most explicit confession of his faith. It contains much harsh criticism of contemporary England and her ways, and elaborate schemes for her social reconstruction. *Fors Clavigera* has many affinities with *Past and Present*: with less intensity and gusto, it has greater variety of mood and theme. If it is not Ruskin's greatest work, it is certainly his most comprehensive. It has been called by Mr. Frederic Harrison its author's *Hamlet*, and also his *Apocalypse*.

Ruskin's economics have been as severely criticized as his aesthetics. Much of his thinking is marred by perversity and prejudice and by a tendency not only to preach but to scold. These qualities are curiously at variance with the perfection of his best English. The first volume of *Modern Painters* had at once stamped him as a master of periodic prose. The main virtues of his early descriptive writing are its variety and rhythm, and the long exquisite sweep of its periods. Combined with this, there is a simplicity and chastity of language, and a careful avoidance of those verbal perversities which many modern writers sedulously cultivate. The style of *Fors Clavigera* is as spontaneous as that of any of his earlier works, but here, as throughout his later writings, his periods are relatively short, and there is little fine writing for fine writing's sake.

Bagehot. Walter Bagehot (1826–1877), a banker by profession, wrote largely on economic and constitutional subjects; his chief books in these kinds were *The English Constitution*, *Lombard Street* (1873), and the very remarkable *Physics and Politics* (1869). Of more interest from our present point of view are the essays in literary criticism which he from time to time contributed to the *National Review* and other periodicals. Particularly brilliant are his estimates of Shakespeare, Milton, Dickens, and Wordsworth. Whatever be his subject, his style is admirably clear and easy, and is diversified with witty aphorisms. It has been said with truth that he cared more for the humanities of literature than for its formal graces. His mind was brilliant rather than profound, but his quick flashlight has lit up many obscure places of thought.

Pater. Walter Pater (1839–1894) is notable for his exquisite sense of beauty in literature and life. While a Fellow of Brasenose,



Oxford, he published his *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873), which volume, together with his lectures and conversation, had a profound influence on such younger men as Oscar Wilde and Arthur Symonds. Its description of Leonardo da Vinci's Mona Lisa is his most celebrated single piece of prose; but his greatest sustained work is *Marius the Epicurean* (1885), which presents in highly-wrought English a picture of life at Rome under the Antonines, and also, like the studies of Florian Deleal and Emerald Uthwart in his posthumously published *Miscellaneous Studies*, draws a profoundly subtle portrait of its author's youthful soul. His chief remaining works are his *Imaginary Portraits* (1887), *Appreciations* (1889), *Greek Studies* (1895), and the unfinished *Gaston de Latour* (1896). Gaston is a French Marius of the sixteenth century, 'a clerk in orders', contemporary with Ronsard and Montaigne, and enthusiastic for the new learning. Pater, epicurean as he was in his fine savouring of life, showed all the asceticism of a great artist in his toil at the creation of beauty. His style is not, as has been sometimes claimed, ornate; but its simplicity is exotic. It is not a style-of-all-work, and fails when set, as it sometimes was, to perform 'the daily round, the common task'. It is at its best in flights of pure description and imagination; for instance in the perfect translation in *Marius* of Apuleius' tale of Cupid and Psyche.

Less great as a stylist, but equally sensitive to beauty in Symonds. all its forms, was John Addington Symonds (1840-1893), whose greatest work, *The Renaissance in Italy*, deals with its subject almost entirely from an aesthetic standpoint. There is much fine criticism and fine writing in this work, and in *In the Key of Blue*, and his remaining volumes; but on the whole his self-criticism remains true: 'I have not the inevitable touch of the true poet, the unconquerable patience of the conscious artist.'

The literary criticism of W. E. Henley (1849-1903) has of Henley. late been disparaged as prejudiced and impressionistic; but prejudice may be the exaggeration of strength no less than of weakness, and the impressions of genius are no mean things. There are, moreover, 'nine-and-sixty ways of constructing tribal' reviews. In Henley's *Views and Reviews* (1890-1901), and in his longer essays on Burns, Fielding, Smollett, and others, there is genius in abundance. Many hold him in affection for the grace and vigour of his style. He not only wrote well himself, but was the cause of good writing in many younger men. In a day when prose, whether journalistic or academic, is apt to be dull and mediocre, we may be grateful for one who writes, as Cyrano fought, with a flourish of the 'panache'.

One of the most honoured figures of the last generation was Leslie Sir Leslie Stephen (1832-1904), whose work as editor of the Stephen. *Dictionary of National Biography* is of high national value. Stephen's leading philosophic work is his *English Utilitarians* (1900), but he is at his best in the realm where biography and

literary criticism meet, as in his *Hours in a Library* (1874-9), his *Studies of a Biographer* (1898), and the admirable monographs on Johnson, Pope, Swift, and George Eliot, which he contributed to the *English Men of Letters* series. His sympathies were largely with the eighteenth century, and he began that work of rehabilitating Johnson, which has been so sympathetically carried on by men like Sir Walter Raleigh and Mr. John Bailey. Stephen's style is clear and strong, and sometimes admirably racy.

Lang. Andrew Lang (1844-1912) in his early manhood wrote much charming poetry, which is preserved in a succession of volumes including *Ballades in Blue China*, *Rhymes à la Mode*, and *Grass of Parnassus*. There is the same charm, together with fine critical insight, in his best prose essays. In later life he handled most of the known varieties of literature, from history to leader-writing. It has been said of him that he 'sometimes writes like Genesis, and sometimes in the *Daily News*'. To many of his admirers it seems a pity that he gave up to ghosts what was meant for mankind: they would have preferred less spiritualistic research and more poetry. His style toward the end suffered greatly through over-use.

Borrow. A few of the great books of the period deal with travel. George Borrow (1803-1881) is chiefly memorable through three volumes, *The Bible in Spain* (1843), *Lavengro* (1851), and *The Romany Rye* (1857). The last two record many episodes of his early wanderings in England, and abound in strange scenes and characters, described in curiously fascinating prose. No reader of these books will ever forget the gipsies—lovable Petulengro, odious Mrs. Herne, Tawno Chikno the beautiful; nor the fair girl boxer, Isopel Berners; nor the great fight in Mumpers's Dingle between Lavengro and the Flaming Tinman; nor the wanderer's musings upon life, and the wind on the heath; nor the man who touched against the evil chance; nor him who had sinned against the Holy Ghost. *The Bible in Spain*, that very unconventional record of his travels on behalf of the British Bible Society, has the same strange charm and even greater colour. The unusual and the uncanny, always dear to Borrow, are here evident in his portrayal of Benedict Mol. His account of his journey to Finisterre is masterly. Borrow has inspired so special and eager a zest among his readers that one would call him the subject of a cult, did not the cult include all who care in the least for genius and good writing.

Kinglake. Alexander William Kinglake (1809-1891) is famous through his brilliantly written volume of Eastern travel, *Eothen* (1844), and his vivid but biased and unduly long *Invasion of the Crimea* (1863-87). Kinglake's style has been severely, probably too severely, dealt with by Matthew Arnold. If it is flashy and 'brassy', it is also vivid and picturesque, and its merits are especially evident in the battle-pieces which are the best part of the *Invasion*.

That headstrong and original genius, Sir Richard Burton



(1821–1890), has left a great book of adventure and travel in Burton his *Pilgrimage to El Medinah and Meccah* (1855–6). His version and of *The Arabian Nights* (1885–8), with its strange and racy others. vocabulary, the swing and joy of its rhythm, and its erudite and startling notes, must be reckoned among the great translations. An equally wild genius was Laurence Oliphant (1829–1888), who has left several books of travel (for example, *Episodes in a Life of Adventure*, 1887), and a brilliant novel of social satire, *Piccadilly* (1870). Much of Oliphant's adventure had lain in Japan : it was left to Lafcadio Hearn (1850–1904) to settle there and to record the impressions of his life in several volumes of sensitive and charming prose (*Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan*, 1894; *Kokoro*, 1896, &c., &c.). Richard Jefferies (1848–1887) was a wanderer, but in the fields of England : a keen observer of nature, and a man of great imaginative feeling, he is chiefly read in his *Wild Life in a Southern County* (1879), *The Amateur Poacher* (1879), and kindred works.

*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and *Through the Looking-Glass* (1871) give 'Lewis Carroll' (Charles Lutwidge Carroll.) (Dodgson, 1832–1898) a place assured and apart in our literature. He limned his elfin world with conviction, and wrote nonsense with inspiration. Few modern authors are better known and better loved.

## CHAPTER XXXIII

### THE VICTORIAN NOVEL

Dickens, Thackeray, the Brontës, George Eliot, Charles and Henry Kingsley, Wilkie Collins, George Meredith, Stevenson, Butler, Gissing and others — Conclusion.

WE have already noticed the main characteristics of the Dickens. Victorian novel, and in this relation have touched on the novels of Charles Dickens (1812–1870). Very few critics would now be found to deny that he was among England's, and indeed the world's, great masters of fiction; but opinions still vary considerably as to the exact grounds of his greatness. Though his first notable production, *Pickwick Papers* (1836), is not his most pretentious work, it is probably his greatest, just as *Don Juan* is the greatest, though not the most pretentious, work of Byron. For one thing Dickens was here, in large measure, relieved from the necessity of employing pathos, a quality on which his touch was never sure. Secondly, the book, like Gogol's *Dead Souls*, with which it has much in common,<sup>1</sup> proceeds after a loose and bustling fashion which takes little account of plot, and is well suited to its author's free inspiration.

<sup>1</sup> Compare, for instance, the character and relationships of Mr. Jingle and Job Trotter with those of Tchitchikoff and Petrushka.

Mr. Pickwick and his comrades are immortal, and so is Sam Weller, a being compact of 'humours', yet never becoming a mere abstraction, after the tendency of some of Dickens's later grotesques. *Pickwick Papers* brought Dickens immediate fame, and launched him upon the activity of the next twenty years, which produced the larger part of his greatest work: *Oliver Twist* (1838), *Nicholas Nickleby* (1839), *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1841), *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1844), *Dombey and Son* (1848), and *David Copperfield* (1850).

His elemental creative force may best be realized from the fact that these six novels have peopled the minds of Englishmen with a small army of unforgettable characters, among whom are such villains as Monk, Squeers, Ralph Nickleby, Quilp, Jonas Chuzzlewit, Uriah Heep, and such grotesques as the Kenwigs family, the Cheeryble Brothers, Vincent Crummies, Dick Swiveller, the Marchioness, Mark Tapley, Tom Pinch, Miss Trotwood, and Wilkins Micawber. The interest of Dickens in grotesque characters may have been originally due to the influence of Smollett, whom he had read eagerly as a boy. It is significant of his bent and method that in all the novels of this period, except *Barnaby Rudge* (1841), character predominates over plot, and that that novel, in which character is in great measure subordinated, is the weakest work of the series. A certain decline has been noticed in the later novels, from *Little Dorrit* (1857) through *Great Expectations* (1861) and *Our Mutual Friend* (1865) to the unfinished *Edwin Drood* (1870): yet in every one of these there is work of the first order. To this period, too, belongs his brilliant historical novel, *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), where for the first time he tells a story with a perfectly coherent plot.

His Place  
among  
Novelists.

During the lifetime of Dickens his pathos found as many admirers as his humour, and this popular approbation was endorsed by many excellent judges. Macaulay, as we all know, wept over the death of Little Nell, while Jeffrey declared *Dombey and Son* to possess 'all the lofty and terrible attributes of tragedy'. Modern criticism would probably endorse Forster's verdict that little Paul is more pathetic than little Nell; but on the whole it has small sympathy for either child, and still less for little Dorrit. It seems to share Meredith's suspicion of the pathetic character who is 'allowed to rush at you, roll you over, and squeeze your body for the briny drops'. Dickens's portrayal of villains, too, is often unsure and unconvincing; a well-known modern critic has declared Ralph Nickleby 'altogether too steep'. On the other hand, Dickens's comic genius stands higher to-day than it ever did, and full justice has also been done by such devotees as Swinburne to his genius for description, as embodied, for instance, in his masterly pictures of London and its river. Many of his serious figures, for instance Hortense in *Bleak House* and Rigaud in *Little Dorrit*, seem overdrawn and artificial, and inspire little belief in his own belief in them; and



the same may be said of many of his more serious situations. One may reflect, for instance, how much more greatly and terribly the murder of Mr. Tulkinghorn would have been managed by Balzac, or even, after his more lurid fashion, by Hugo. But ours is a fastidious generation, and, like the Pole family in *Sandra Belloni*, it is perhaps too great a stickler for the 'fine shades'. It is quite possible that a more robust and eager age may recapture the enthusiasm of Jeffrey and Macaulay, and feel the spell of something in Dickens to which our own age has grown somewhat callous. And in no case is it fair to say that because he is not a pastmaster in pathos his genius lies only in the direction of comedy. Apart from his instinct for colour and atmosphere, he has a powerful, though not unerring, touch on the sinister. His characterization has been described as rather Jonsonian than Shakespearean: yet Jonson limned the 'humours' of humankind as masterly in the dark shadows of *Volpone* as in the laughing sunlight of *Every Man in his Humour*; and similarly the creator of Joey Bagstock and Miss Tox has drawn also Mr. Littimer and the elder Mr. Smallweed. Dickens's practice of portraying social evils in his novels has been frequently criticized, and sometimes very absurdly: the laboured descriptions of the Circumlocution Office certainly overweight the story, such as it is, of *Little Dorrit*; but in describing the academies of Mr. Squeers and Doctor Blimber, Dickens keeps strictly within the colour and compass of his tale, while the Court of Chancery forms quite a fitting background to the sinister outline of *Bleak House*. Dickens's elemental force and his rich and various imagination will always ensure him place among the great novelists of the world.

The earliest notable work of Dickens's great and confessed rival, William Makepeace Thackeray (1811-1863), consisted of contributions to *Fraser's*, *Punch*, and other magazines. In this way were originally produced *Barry Lyndon* (1844), *The Yellowplush Papers* (1837-46), *The Great Hoggarty Diamond*, and *The Book of Snobs* (1846). The last three of these works contain much that is most typical of Thackeray's genius, and much that was later to take fuller shape in his great novels. They show his keen, and at this period rather acrid, sense of the humours and weaknesses of society, as envisaged by the clubman, the snob, and the footman; and they present the tragedy of them that fall no less than the comedy of them that climb. There are few stronger situations in Thackeray than the quarrel between the Earl of Crabs and his son, Algernon Deuceace, portrayed in the closing pages of *The Yellowplush Papers*. It is only at moments, however, that these early sketches achieve the quality of his later and more characteristic work. *Barry Lyndon*, the autobiography of a scoundrelly adventurer, is inimitable in its seeming-unconscious satire, which varies markedly in method from that of those still greater satirical novels, Fielding's *Jonathan Wild*,

Thackeray  
—His  
Great  
Novels.

and Samuel Butler's *The Way of All Flesh*. But Thackeray was not to come into his own, either in achievement or reputation, till the appearance in 1847 of *Vanity Fair*, which at once brought him fame. The chief men and women of this novel, headed by the superlative Becky Sharp, are among the classic characters of our fiction; and the manners of the time are presented under a form of masterly satirical realism, marred occasionally by undue moralization. Like all Thackeray's novels except *Esmond*, *Vanity Fair* was written from day to day for serial publication, and hence exhibits a certain unwieldiness of construction. It was succeeded by *Pendennis* (1848-50), with its note of autobiography and its superb picture of the worldling of worldlings, Major Pendennis. Thackeray's most perfect work, in point of style and construction, is the historical novel *Esmond* (1852), in which he relaxes the satirical tension, and gives us the noble figure of Henry Esmond to place beside the seductive Beatrix. *The Newcomes* (1853-5) contains in Colonel Newcome the most lovable character Thackeray ever drew. *The Virginians* (1857-9) is the sequel to *Esmond*, and after the fashion of sequels, by no means its equal. These, with *Catherine* (1839-40), *Philip* (1861-2), and the unfinished historical novel *Denis Duval*, represent Thackeray's chief achievement in fiction.

His  
Lectures  
and  
Essays.

Outside the novel Thackeray's chief work in prose consists of lectures and essays. In 1851 he began to lecture in England, and in the same year, and again in 1855, he made the tour of America. In his first course, *The English Humourists of the Eighteenth Century*, descriptive and imaginative force are more evident than critical insight. If his account of Addison and Steele is illuminating, his estimate of Swift, despite its great power, is grotesquely unjust. In *The Four Georges*, his second course, Thackeray was both helped and handicapped by his experience as a writer of fiction. His estimates of the four kings are penned with his old satirical and descriptive power; but he lacks the true historic sense, and cares little for the greater events and movements of the period. Among his most notable essays are *The Roundabout Papers*, originally contributed to the *Cornhill Magazine*, which he founded, and edited from 1860 to 1862. In these he discourses with ease and force of his past memories and his present experiences, and of life in general. The *Roundabouts* contain some of his finest prose.

Qualities  
of his  
Genius.

Most of Thackeray's earlier work, and some of his later, was written in conscious reaction against the prevailing romanticism of his day, and as far as popular appreciation goes, he is subject to the disabilities incident to all who are frequently possessed by the spirit of negation. If he avoids Dickens's exaggeration and exuberance, it must be admitted that he also lacks much that is most human and elemental in him, and brings with him little of the colour and feeling and fire which



make the great romanticist of common life an evangelist to many. Yet Thackeray's portraiture, his style, and his grasp of situation are, all at their best, superb. He was a master of the sinister, in which his greatest achievement is the portrait of Lord Steyne in *Vanity Fair*. His best grotesques—Foker, Costigan, and 'F. B.'—are inimitable, and despite the caricature that has gone to their making, they are far nearer to the life than those of Dickens. His restraint is often a quality of strength, just as Dickens's exuberance is often an exaggeration of it. Thackeray was only a cynic by fits. His satire alternates curiously with the sentimentalism which inspired the death-scene of Colonel Newcome.

The three sisters Brontë—Charlotte, Emily, and Anne—were all novelists, and two of them were novelists of genius. In 1846 they published collectively a volume of *Poems by Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell*, chiefly remarkable for the work of Emily, who was the greatest, and perhaps the only, poet of the three. Charlotte's first novel, *The Professor*, is comparatively crude: it was rejected when first submitted for publication, and was not given to the world till after her death. The first novel of Anne, *Agnes Grey*, appeared in 1847, simultaneously with the masterpiece of her sister Emily, *Wuthering Heights*. In 1848 appeared Anne's second novel, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, but neither it nor its predecessor would now be remembered were it not for the greater work of the two other sisters.

Charlotte lives chiefly by three novels—*Jane Eyre* (1847), *Shirley* (1849), and *Villette* (1853). Of these *Jane Eyre* is generally, and with justice, considered to be the greatest, owing to the power and subtlety displayed in the portrait of the dependant loved, and eventually won, by Rochester, the victim of a miserable first marriage. *Shirley* has a greater variety of characters, including the delightful heroine, Shirley Keildar (a portrait of Emily), the squire Yorke, and the two brothers Moore. The novel has for its background the Yorkshire moors, among which Charlotte had lived, and which she here describes in a masterly fashion. *Villette*, which is in large measure autobiographical, describes the wooing of the school assistant, Lucy Snowe, by that strange and tyrannous but true-hearted lover, M. Paul. Despite the limited outlook and occasional crudity of thought which were the legacy of her restricted early life, there is a warm colouring of humanity and a passionate intensity of imagination about Charlotte Brontë's best work, and these have won her the homage of many who, like Swinburne, are but feebly stirred by the colder and more perfect artistry of Jane Austen. The same crudities, redeemed and transfigured by the same intensity of imagination, appear in *Wuthering Heights*. For good and for bad, despite the homeliness of their scenes and subjects, the three Brontës were right romantics at heart.

'George Eliot' (Mary Ann Evans, or Mrs. Cross, 1819–1880) possessed hardly less natural inspiration than Charlotte

The  
Brontës.

'George  
Eliot'.

Brontë, together with a wider knowledge of life, a keener sense of humour, and stronger reasoning power. She was a good scholar in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, and had also taught herself French, German, and Italian. Her early work consisted mainly of translation and essay writing. She published translations of Strauss's *Leben Jesu* in 1846, and of Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity* in 1854. In 1851, after her father's death, she became assistant editor of the *Westminster Review*, to which she contributed regularly for many years. This experience, together with the influence of G. H. Lewes, her husband in all but name, increased both her love and her power of writing; but she did not discover her true strength till she began to write fiction. Her early stories, *Scenes of Clerical Life* (1857-8), *Adam Bede* (1859), *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), and *Silas Marner* (1861), gave her rank as one of the foremost novelists of her age. They all deal with country life and character as observed by herself in the midland counties of England, and despite their somewhat austere philosophic background, they show the play of a great imagination upon existence in both its tragic and comic aspects. The greatest of all these novels, in George Eliot's own opinion, was *Adam Bede*; and it is indeed doubtful whether she ever surpassed in tragedy the tale of Hetty Sorrel, or in comedy the character of Mrs. Poyser. Yet *Silas Marner*, the tale of a miser's redemption through the love of a little child, is a true work of art; and the character of Maggie Tulliver, in *The Mill on the Floss*, is an exquisite piece of spiritual autobiography. Less spontaneous is the elaborate historical romance, *Romola* (1863), chiefly memorable for its vivid portrait of Savonarola, of Romola herself, and of her tragically fated lover, Tito Melema. Less successful than any of these novels are the carefully planned and often unduly laboured *Felix Holt the Radical* (1866), and *Daniel Deronda* (1876), which aims at presenting a sympathetic study of the Jewish character. By far the greatest novel of George Eliot's later years was *Middlemarch* (1871-2), with its broad canvas and vigorously drawn central characters, Casaubon and Dorothea, Lydgate and Rosamond. The *Impressions of Theophrastus Such* (1879) are studies of men and manners lacking neither humour nor insight, yet often marred by their author's fondness for heavy abstract speculation.

Though George Eliot wrote a good deal of verse, she can hardly be ranked among the poets. Neither in her shorter poems, nor in such more pretentious efforts as *The Spanish Gypsy* and *The Legend of Jubal*, is there the true fire.

The earliest novels of Charles Kingsley (1819-1875), *Yeast* (1848) and *Alton Locke* (1850), represent, after different fashions, the ferment working in English life as a result of the great mid-century revolutionary movement. *Hypatia* (1853) is a brilliant historical novel centring round the famous woman who taught Neoplatonism and suffered for her faith in the



fifth century; but Kingsley's greatest, and by far his most popular, novel is *Westward Ho*, with its brilliant pictures of Elizabethan adventure and the splendidly drawn characters of John Oxenham and Salvation Yeo. His chief remaining novels are *Two Years Ago* (1857), *The Water Babies* (1863), and *Hereward the Wake* (1866). Charles's brother, Henry, deserves mention chiefly for *Geoffry Hamlyn* (1859) and *Ravenshoe* (1861), the former of which divides with *Robbery Under Arms* (by Rolf Boldrewood) the honour of being the best Australian novel ever written.

Wilkie Collins (1824–1889) was a prolific novelist, now best remembered by *The Woman in White* (1860) and *The Moonstone* (1868). These novels possess little psychological depth, and depend largely on the sensational, but are well constructed and are capital examples of their particular class. Some of his characters have become classics—notably Sergeant Cuff, the rose-fancying detective, and that redoubtable spy, Count Fosco.

Many minors of merit must be omitted here, and living novelists lie outside our scope. We may conclude this chapter with a discussion of two leading novelists of the later Victorian period. The first of these, George Meredith (1828–1909), seems secure of a place among the masters of English fiction, though certain critics have attempted to oust him from this vantage. His poetry has been discussed in a previous chapter: a knowledge of it, and of his *Essay in Comedy*, is essential for a full understanding of many things in his novels. It was as a poet that he began, and it is as poet that to some he still seems greatest. His earliest prose works of note were *The Shaving of Shagpat* (1856), an Eastern fantasy suffused with an element of burlesque, and *Farina* (1857). In 1859 appeared *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*, a work far more characteristic of his genius, and containing some of its greatest qualities. This story shows the egoist as father, just as Meredith's second great masterpiece was to show him as lover. The tragedy of the novel lies in the wrecking of Richard's life through the attempt made by his father, Sir Austin Feverel, to impose upon him a system of education utterly out of keeping with the conditions of life. But the book is far more than a mere novel of purpose—it is at once a tragedy, a comedy, and a romance. It has many faults, yet contains several characters for ever memorable. The first meeting of Richard and his destined wife, Lucy, at the river weir, is an idyll of great beauty, and the idyll deepens inevitably into the terrible *dénouement* which leads to Richard's separation from his wife, and her eventual death. Adrian Harley, the 'wise youth', is the first of Meredith's numerous wits and cynics. 'The Pilgrim's Scrip' illustrates that tendency to aphorism, satirical, sage or poetic, which increases throughout the novels till it comes to a head in *One of our Conquerors* and *The Amazing*

*Marriage*. Meredith's aim, even in *The Ordeal*, had been to show the spirit of comedy at work on life, and in the prelude to the novel he had described it as watching over sentimentalism with a birch rod, yet as not opposed to romance. It is this conception of comedy as the guardian of civilization which gives all his novels their distinctive tone and colour, and renders it easy for them to pass from a comic to a tragic reading of life. While comedy performs her task of guardianship and the characters react upon her discipline, the general tendency may be satire suffused with romance, as in *Evan Harrington* (1861), the love story of a tailor's son; and *Harry Richmond* (1871), a fantastic love romance containing many charming passages and that magnificent failure in characterization, Roy Richmond. But while life lasts there will always be outlaws to civilization and to her guardian spirit. The punishment meted out to these may be either satirically terrible, like that undergone by Sir Willoughby Patterne in *The Egoist* (1879), or tragically terrible, like that which befalls Sir Austin in *Richard Feverel*, or Sigismund Alvan (Ferdinand Lassalle) in *The Tragic Comedians* (1880).

*The  
Egoist.*

*The Egoist* is the second of the three great novels which show Meredith's genius at its highest. Its leading figure, Sir Willoughby, is the incarnation of an egoism towering, superb, and, in great part, unconscious. 'When his pride is at ease he is a prince'; but his whole satisfaction in life depends on the homage of dependants, and when these become rebels to his will, and try to live their own lives, his magnificence deserts him, and he becomes a petty tyrant, the easy prey of the Imps of Comedy, who appear in the 'Prelude' to the novel. He courts three women successively, but each of these catches in turn a glimpse of his inner soul. The first two shrink back shuddering and seek refuge, literally, in flight; while Laetitia, on whose blind adoration he had always counted, becomes critical and disillusioned, and only accepts him in the end with a kind of cold compassion, which to the reader constitutes his supreme humiliation. Clara Middleton, the heroine of the book, is one of the delightful English girls whom Meredith drew with mastery and variety. Her lover, Vernon Whitford, scholar and mountaineer—'Phoebus Apollo turned fasting friar'—is a type of man dear to Meredith's heart, reappearing in *The Amazing Marriage*, with due variations, as Gower Woodseer, and praised again in the poem *Hard Weather*. Lacking in some measure the romantic and tragic quality of *Richard Feverel*, *The Egoist*, by virtue of its realistic and satiric quality, illustrates more typically Meredith's conception of comedy in life and literature.

*Diana of  
the Cross-  
ways.*

*Diana of the Crossways* (1885) is generally held to be the third of Meredith's masterpieces. Its heroine is a beautiful woman of a highly wrought and artistic intelligence, face to face with a world alternately admiring and censorious. For many the charm and verisimilitude of Diana's character is destroyed by



her gross and mercenary treachery to the 'frosty Cupid', her lover, Dacier. A far less justifiable objection is that taken to her eventual union with the unimaginative and practical Tom Redworth, in whom Meredith clearly wishes us to see her complement and fitting mate.

In point of style Meredith, like Carlyle, begins in comparative simplicity, but gradually evolves an intensely personal utterance of his own. The progress may be seen by a comparison of the early *Ordeal* with that extreme specimen of his later style, *One of our Conquerors*. Rugged, ruffling, fantastic, his diction at this later period is generally quite apt to his thought and wit, and to that blend of poetry and humour which is a main mark of his genius. If there are occasional perversity and affectation, these qualities are of style only: they do not pass beyond the suburbs of his soul; for there is hardly a novelist in English whose handling of life is more sane and whole and virile.<sup>1</sup>

In passing from Meredith it becomes tempting to say a word concerning the two great novelists, Thomas Hardy and Henry James; but for different reasons both of these lie outside the scope of this treatise, and we must go back to Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-1894). From his boyhood, as he has told us, he had practised the art of writing, using various great English writers successively as his models. The result is a style as artificial as Meredith's, but clear and simple where his is fantastic and sometimes obscure. The hackneyed phrase 'studied simplicity' suits his style perfectly, and to Stevensonians it seems rather a grace than a drawback that the marks of the study are everywhere upon the finished work. In this respect he differs utterly from his greater forerunner, Scott, whose artistry is never self-conscious, often lax, and occasionally non-existent. Stevenson's earliest novel, *Treasure Island* (1882), is probably still his most widely read work. Every island, as he himself has stated, is a romance in itself; and when to this are added pirates, and such glorious villains as Silver and Pew, the result becomes 'a trap to catch all childhood'—and all manhood too. His finest finished novel, however, is *Kidnapped* (1886), with its vividly drawn figure of the Jacobite adventurer, Alan Breck. The great fight in the roundhouse of the 'Covenant', the murder of the 'Red Fox', and the flight across the heather of Alan and David, are among the unforgettable scenes of English fiction. But his greatest work of all is to be found in his unfinished novel, *Weir of Hermiston* (1896), where the central characters, Weir, the hanging judge, his son Archie, the two Kirsties, and the four Elliott brothers, are all drawn with superb strength and delicacy. This fragment is master's work, and if Stevenson

<sup>1</sup> Chief among Meredith's remaining novels are *Sandra Belloni* (1864), *Rhoda Fleming* (1865), *Vittoria* (1867), and *Lord Ormont and his Aminta* (1894).

had lived to finish it, and had written more novels of the same greatness, his place would have been among the very highest.

Novels less great, yet fine in their degree, are *The Master of Ballantrae* (1889), *Catriona* (1893), and the unfinished *St. Ives* (1897). Of lower value is *The Black Arrow* (1888). In collaboration with his stepson, Lloyd Osbourne, Stevenson wrote *The Wrecker* (1892) and *The Ebb Tide* (1894), both studies of South Sea life. *The Ebb Tide* has again an island for its setting, and contains four of Stevenson's most powerfully drawn characters—the sinister and religious Attwater, the diabolical cockney, Huish, Herrick the sensitive, and the strangely fascinating ship's captain, Davis.

His Tales,  
Essays,  
and  
Letters.

Stevenson was a master of the short story. His triumphs in this kind are probably *Thrawn Janet*,—in his own opinion one of the greatest things he ever wrote,—*The Pavilion on the Links*, and *The Beach of Falesa*. A masterpiece in the sinister is *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886). Before 'commencing novelist' Stevenson had written several volumes<sup>1</sup> of miscellaneous prose which contain much fine descriptive writing, much eloquent criticism and generalization, an unfortunate estimate of François Villon, and a splendid essay on human life, *Pulvis et Umbra*. His letters and especially his *Vailima Letters* contain some perfect prose, and are instinct with the charm which has made him well beloved both in life and literature. As a poet, except in a few pieces such as *Requiem*, he was not consummate, though his *Child's Garden of Verse* is full of charm.

Butler.

Samuel Butler (1835–1902) has left a great satirical novel in *The Way of All Flesh*, which describes certain conditions of English life with deadly bitterness and humour, and concludes in a fashion after Butler's own heart, by making its hero gain self-respect for the first time through breaking the law and going to prison. Few characters in English fiction have been drawn with darker and grimmer humour than the odious parson, Theobald Pontifex. Less grim and more fantastic in their satire are *Erewhon* (1872) and *Erewhon Revisited* (1901), where the conditions of modern life are travestied in the picture of the strange country 'over the range'. Butler's wit appears in brief and deadly form in the aphorisms of his *Notebooks*.

Gissing  
and  
others.

George Gissing (1857–1903) has described the struggle of his own short life with great charm and intimacy in the *Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* (1903). His greatest novel is undoubtedly the powerfully realistic *New Grub Street* (1891); though there is also genius in *Demos* (1886) and *Thyrza* (1887).

Chief among the remaining novelists of the period are the

<sup>1</sup> *An Inland Voyage* (1878), *Travels with a Donkey in the Cevennes* (1879), *Virginibus Puerisque* (1881), and *Familiar Studies of Men and Books* (1882).



following : George John Whyte-Melville (1821–1878), author of several spirited sporting tales, and a fairly successful historical novel, *The Gladiators* (1863); Richard Blackmore (1825–1900), whose *Lorna Doone* (1869) is an admirable, and almost a great, historical romance ; William Sharp (1856–1905), who, under the pseudonym Fiona Macleod, wrote poems and tales instinct with Celtic mysticism ; Walter Besant (1836–1901), who collaborated with James Rice (1843–1882) in several most readable novels—e.g. *Ready-Money Mortiboy* (1872) and *The Golden Butterfly* (1876)—and wrote single-handed others not less readable (e.g. *All Sorts and Conditions of Men* (1882) and *The Children of Gibeon* (1886)); George MacDonald (1824–1905), a minor master of the novel of Scottish life and character (*David Elginbrod* (1863), *Robert Falconer* (1868), &c.); John Watson ('Ian Maclaren'—1850–1907), a member, though by no means the chief member, of the 'kailyard' novelists whose stories follow the tradition set by Galt, and centre round Scottish parochial life.

As the literature of the past passes on toward the present, it becomes increasingly difficult to appraise it, or do more than single out its greater masters ; and when the present is actually reached, the difficulty and danger of generalization become acute. A few conclusions, however, seem possible. In poetry, the Georgian period has been one rather of interesting experiment than of masterly achievement. For some years before the war, there had been clear signs of an exhaustion of poetic power, a reaction, it would seem, from the mighty activity of the Victorian Age. Yet, despite this slackening, which has occurred in all ages and countries after periods of great artistic energy and tension, the spirit of poetry is awake : there is acute interest in its practice, much daring and brilliancy of formal handling, keen sensibility to new influences, and a wise catholicity of outlook. The burden and agony of the War may seem to have overwhelmed literature for the time being, but out of the War's effort and sacrifice there may well come soon a quickening that shall find expression in great poetry—the poetry which in our literature has so often accompanied the birth, or rebirth, of a great ideal or faith. In the practice of the novel, there has been much brilliancy and some greatness : indeed, one of the greatest novelists who have ever written in English is still with us to-day. Apart from him there have been a few stray masterpieces, but hardly any man stands out as unmistakably a master. In drama there has been still less performance and promise. For reasons already specified, there has for long been an estrangement between our stage and our greatest imaginative literature ; and drama not written for the stage must always fall short of the supreme. Yet there has been brilliancy here too ; and in criticism, as we have shown, there has been brilliancy and something more. If English literature at the present day is

Con-  
clusion.

not supremely great, neither is it decadent. There has been slackening rather than failure: a level has been kept from which greatness may at any time arise. To those who doubt the future, any student of his country's literature might well reply in Rossetti's lines:

Nay, come up hither. From this wave-washed mound  
Unto the furthest flood-brim look with me;  
Then reach on with thy thought till it be drowned.  
Miles and miles distant though the last line be,  
And though thy soul sail leagues and leagues beyond,  
Still, leagues beyond those leagues, there is more sea.



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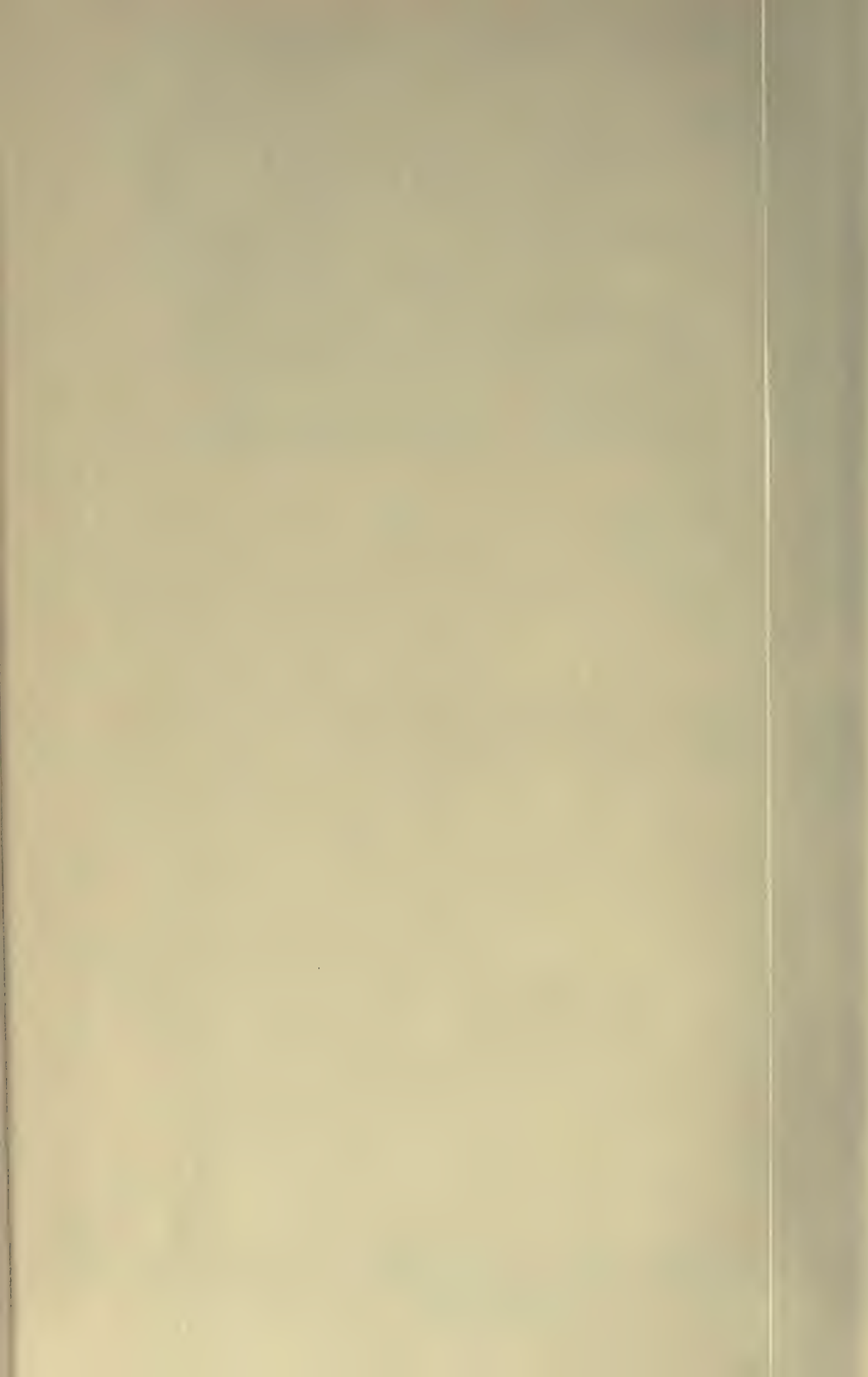


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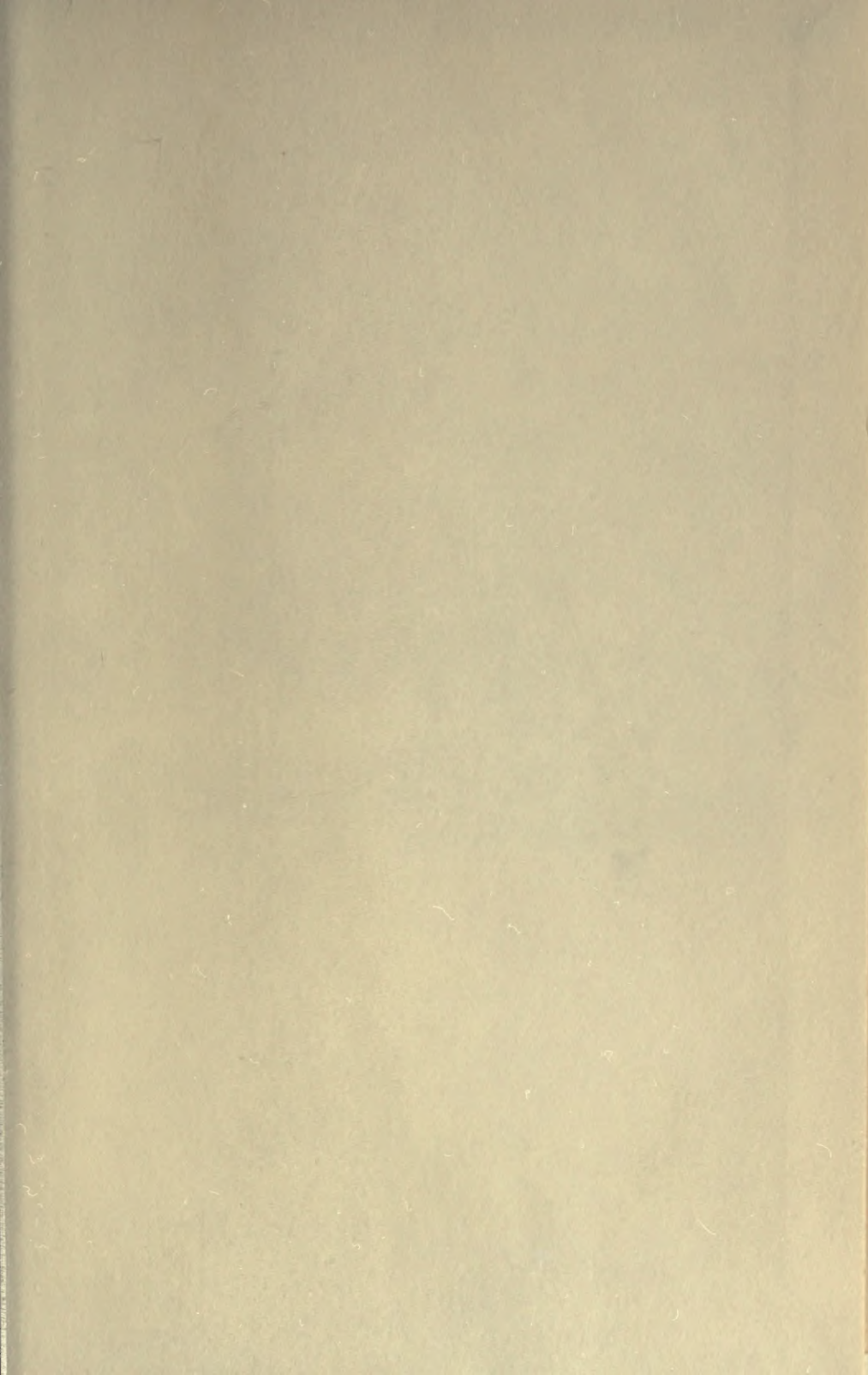
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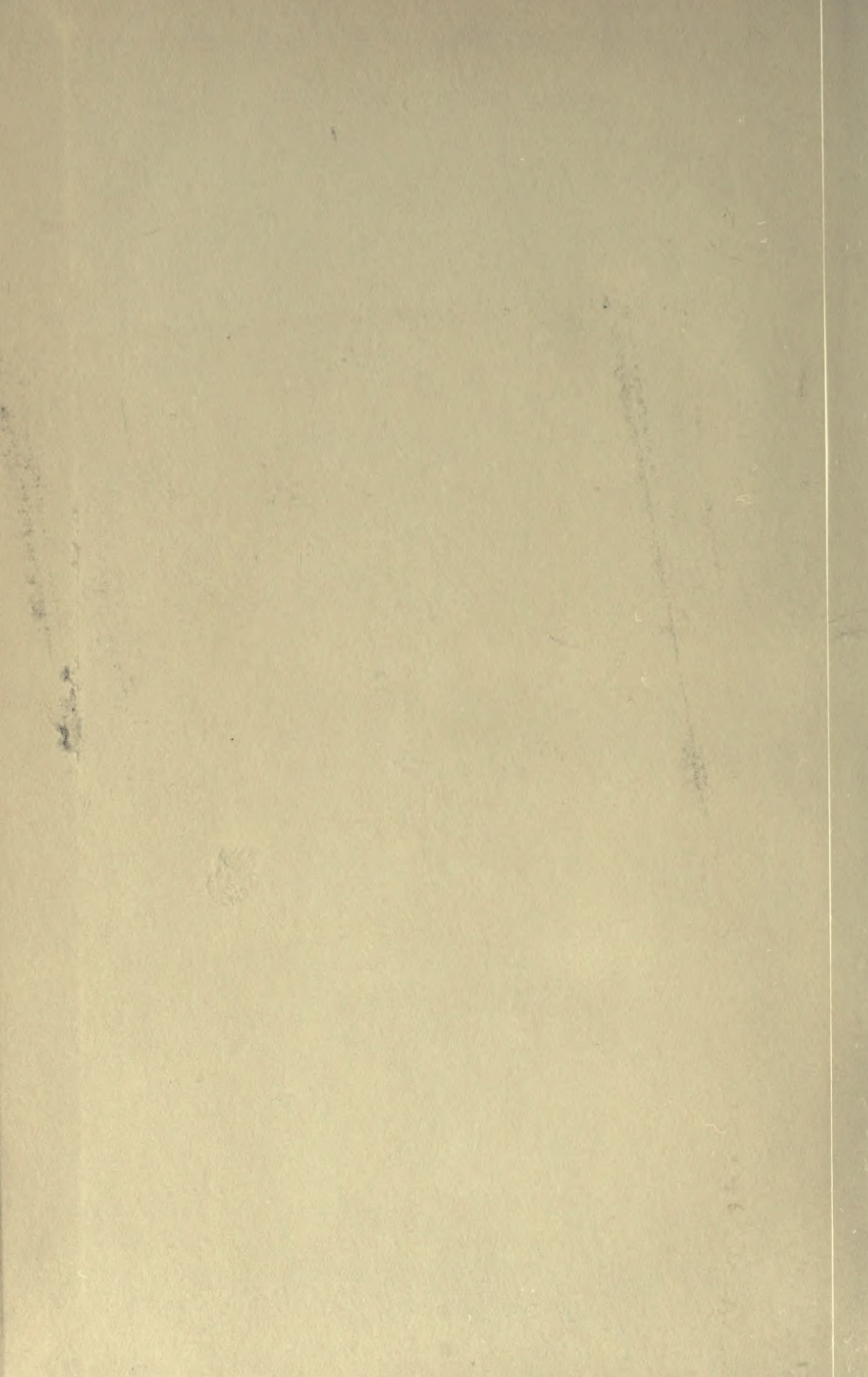














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